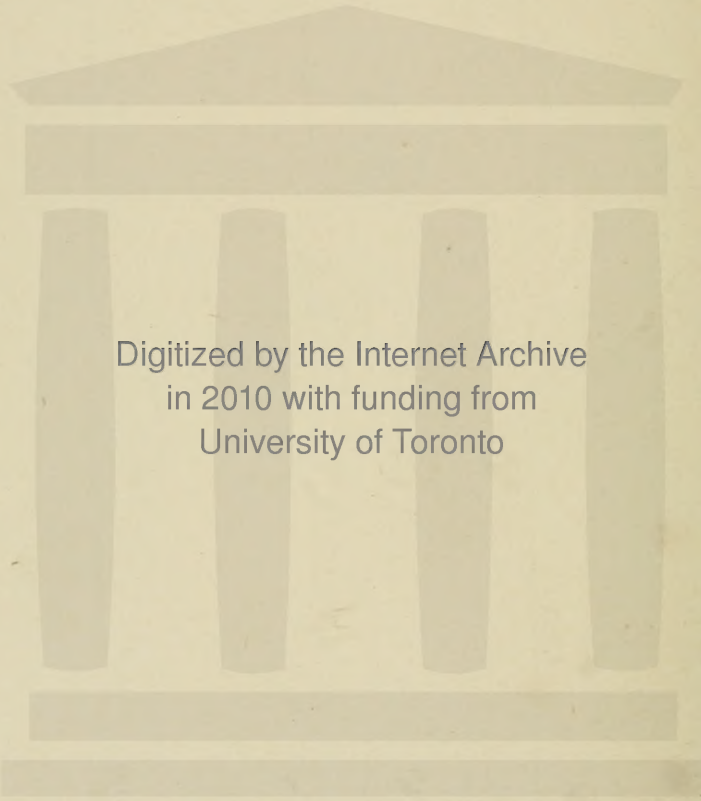



3 1761 08172458 5



Presented to the
LIBRARY *of the*
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by
Victoria College



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Toronto



EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE



Presented to the
LIBRARY of the
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by
Victoria College

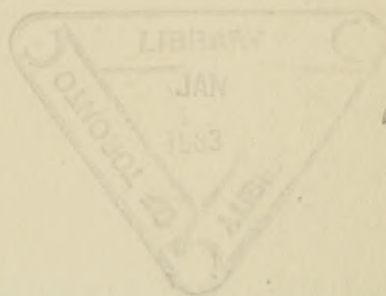
THE BOOKS OF
DEUTERONOMY, JOSHUA
JUDGES, RUTH, AND
FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN

D.D., Litt.D.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON : MCMVI



BS
491
M₃
V.3

CONTENTS

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

	PAGE
GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (Deut. vii. 9)	1
THE LESSON OF MEMORY (Deut. viii. 2)	4
THE EATING OF THE PEACE-OFFERING (Deut. xii. 18)	15
PROPHETS AND THE PROPHET (Deut. xviii. 9-22)	17
A CHOICE OF MASTERS (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48)	22
THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW (Deut. xxx. 11-20)	24
GOD'S TRUE TREASURE IN MAN (Deut. xxxii. 9; TITUS ii. 14)	29
THE EAGLE AND ITS BROOD (Deut. xxxii. 11)	40
THEIR ROCK AND OUR ROCK (Deut. xxxii. 31)	47
GOD AND HIS SAINTS (Deut. xxxiii. 3)	50
ISRAEL THE BELOVED (Deut. xxxiii. 12)	57
'AT THE BUSH' (Deut. xxxiii. 16)	61
SHOD FOR THE ROAD (Deut. xxxiii. 25)	67
A DEATH IN THE DESERT (Deut. xxxiv. 5, 6)	77

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA		PAGE
THE NEW LEADER'S COMMISSION (Joshua i. 1-11)	.	87
THE CHARGE TO THE SOLDIER OF THE LORD (Joshua i. 7, 8)	.	91
THE UNTRODDEN PATH AND THE GUIDING ARK (Joshua iii. 4)	.	99
'THE WATERS SAW THEE; THEY WERE AFRAID' (Joshua iii. 5-17)	.	107
STONES CRYING OUT (Joshua iv. 10-24)	.	115
THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST (Joshua v. 14)	.	123
THE SIEGE OF JERICHO (Joshua vi. 10, 11)	.	132
RAHAB (Joshua vi. 25)	.	140
ACHAN'S SIN, ISRAEL'S DEFEAT (Joshua vii. 1-12)	.	145
THE SUN STAYED (Joshua x. 12)	.	153
UNWON BUT CLAIMED (Joshua xiii. 1-6)	.	158
CALEB—A GREEN OLD AGE (Joshua xiv. 6)	.	160
THE CITIES OF REFUGE (Joshua xx. 1-9)	.	168
THE END OF THE WAR (Joshua xxi. 43-45; xxii. 1-9)	.	175
THE NATIONAL OATH AT SHECHEM (Joshua xxiv. 19-28)	.	183

CONTENTS

vii

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

	PAGE
A SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS AND GOD'S PATIENCE (Judges ii. 1-10)	192
ISRAEL'S OBSTINACY AND GOD'S PATIENCE (Judges ii. 11-23)	196
RECREANT REUBEN (Judges v. 16, R. V.)	206
'ALL THINGS ARE YOURS' (Judges v. 20; Job v. 23)	209
LOVE MAKES SUNS (Judges v. 31)	217
GIDEON'S ALTAR (Judges vi. 24)	225
GIDEON'S FLEECE (Judges vi. 37)	233
'FIT, THOUGH FEW' (Judges vii. 1-8)	238
A BATTLE WITHOUT A SWORD (Judges vii. 13-23)	244
STRENGTH PROFANED AND LOST (Judges xvi. 21-31)	250

THE BOOK OF RUTH

A GENTLE HEROINE, A GENTILE CONVERT (Ruth i. 16-22)	259
---	-----

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

THE CHILD PROPHET (1 Samuel iii. 1-14)	267
FAITHLESSNESS AND DEFEAT (1 Samuel iv. 1-18)	275

	PAGE
REPENTANCE AND VICTORY (1 Samuel vii. 1-12) . . .	283
'MAKE US A KING' (1 Samuel viii. 4-20)	291
THE OLD JUDGE AND THE YOUNG KING (1 Samuel ix. 15-27)	299
THE KING AFTER MAN'S HEART (1 Samuel x. 17-27) . . .	307
SAMUEL'S CHALLENGE AND CHARGE (1 Samuel xii. 1-15) . .	311
OLD TRUTH FOR A NEW EPOCH (1 Samuel xii. 13-25) . . .	319
SAUL REJECTED (1 Samuel xv. 10-23)	323
THE SHEPHERD-KING (1 Samuel xvi. 1-13)	332
THE VICTORY OF UNARMED FAITH (1 Samuel xvii. 32-51) . .	340
A SOUL'S TRAGEDY (1 Samuel xviii. 5-16)	348
JONATHAN, THE PATTERN OF FRIENDSHIP (1 Samuel xx. 1-13)	354
LOVE FOR HATE, THE TRUE <i>QUID PRO QUO</i> (1 Samuel xxiv. 4-17)	361
LOVE AND REMORSE (1 Samuel xxvi. 5-12; 21-25)	367
SAUL (1 Samuel xxviii. 15)	372
'WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?' (1 Samuel xxix. 3; 1 Kings xix. 9)	377
THE SECRET OF COURAGE (1 Samuel xxx. 6)	384
AT THE FRONT OR THE BASE (1 Samuel xxx. 24)	392
THE END OF SELF-WILL (1 Samuel xxxi. 1-13)	399

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

'Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him.'—DEUT. vii. 9.

'FAITHFUL,' like most Hebrew words, has a picture in it. It means something that can be (1) leant on, or (2) builded on.

This leads to a double signification—(1) trustworthy, and that because (2) rigidly observant of obligations. So the word applies to a steward, a friend, or a witness. Its most wonderful and sublime application is to God. It presents to our adoring love—

I. God as coming under obligations to us.

A marvellous and blessed idea. He limits His action, regards Himself as bound to a certain line of conduct.

1. Obligations from His act of creation.

'A faithful Creator,' bound to take care of those whom He has made. To supply their necessities. To satisfy their desires. To give to each the possibility of discharging its ideal.

2. Obligations from His past self.

'God is faithful by whom ye were called,' therefore He will do all that is imposed on Him by His act of calling.

He cannot begin without completing. There are no abandoned mines. There are no half-hewn stones in His quarries, like the block at Baalbec. And this

because the divine nature is inexhaustible in power and unchangeable in purpose.

3. Obligations from His own word.

A revelation is presupposed by the notion of faithfulness. It is not possible in heathenism. 'Dumb idols,' which have given their worshippers no promises, cannot be thought of as faithful. By its grand conception of Jehovah as entering into a covenant with Israel, the Old Testament presents Him to our trust as having bound Himself to a known line of action. Thereby He becomes, if we may so phrase it, a constitutional monarch.

That conception of a Covenant is the negation of caprice, of arbitrary sovereignty, of mystery. We know the principles of His government. His majestic 'I wills' cover the whole ground of human life and needs for the present and the future. We can go into no region of life but we find that God has defined His conduct to us there by some word spoken to our heart and binding Him.

4. Obligations from His new Covenant and highest word in Jesus Christ.

'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.'

II. God as recognising and discharging these obligations.

That He will do so comes from His very nature. With Him there is no change of disposition, no emergence of unseen circumstances, no failure or exhaustion of power.

That He does so is matter of fact. Moses in the preceding context had pointed to facts of history, on which he built the 'know therefore' of the text. On the broad scale the whole world's history is full of illustrations of God's faithfulness to His promises and

His threats. The history of Judaism, the sorrows of nations, and the complications of national events, all illustrate this fact.

The personal history of each of us. The experience of all Christian souls. No man ever trusted in Him and was ashamed. He wills that we should put Him to the proof.

III. God as claiming our trust.

He is faithful, worthy to be trusted, as His deeds show.

Faith is our attitude corresponding to His faithfulness. Faith is the germ of all that He requires from us. How much we need it! How firm it might be! How blessed it would make us!

The thought of God as 'faithful' is, like a precious stone, turned in many directions in Scripture, and wherever turned it flashes light. Sometimes it is laid as the foundation for the confidence that even our weakness will be upheld to the end, as when Paul tells the Corinthians that they will be confirmed to the end, because 'God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son' (1 Cor. i. 9). Sometimes there is built on it the assurance of complete sanctification, as when he prays for the Thessalonians that their 'whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord,' and finds it in his heart to pray thus because 'Faithful is He that calleth you, who will also do it' (1 Thess. v. 24). Sometimes it is presented as the steadfast stay grasping which faith can expect apparent impossibilities, as when Sara 'judged Him faithful who had promised' (Heb. xi. 11). Sometimes it is adduced as bringing strong consolation to souls conscious of their own feeble and fluctuating faith, as when Paul tells Timothy that 'If we are faithless, He abideth faithful; for He

cannot deny Himself' (2 Tim. ii. 13). Sometimes it is presented as an anodyne to souls disturbed by experience of men's unreliableness, as when the apostle heartens the Thessalonians and himself to bear human untrustworthiness by the thought that though men are faithless, God 'is faithful, who shall establish you and keep you from evil' (2 Thess. iii. 2, 3). Sometimes it is put forward to breathe patience into tempted spirits, as when the Corinthians are comforted by the assurance that 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able' (1 Cor. x. 13). Sometimes it is laid as the firm foundation for our assurance of pardon, as when John tells us that 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins' (1 John i. 9). And sometimes that great attribute of the divine nature is proposed as holding forth a pattern for us to follow, and the faith in it as tending to make us in a measure steadfast like Himself, as when Paul indignantly rebuts his enemies' charge of levity of purpose and vacillation, and avers that 'as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay' (2 Cor. i. 18).

THE LESSON OF MEMORY

'Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no.'—DEUT. viii. 2.

THE strand of our lives usually slips away smoothly enough, but days such as this, the last Sunday in a year, are like the knots on a sailor's log, which, as they pass through his fingers, tell him how fast it is being paid out from the reel, and how far it has run off.

They suggest a momentary consciousness of the swift passage of life, and naturally lead us to a glance backwards and forwards, both of which occupations ought to be very good for us. The dead flat upon which some of us live may be taken as an emblem of the low present in which most of us are content to pass our lives, affording nowhere a distant view, and never enabling us to see more than a street's length ahead of us. It is a good thing to get up upon some little elevation and take a wider view, backwards and forwards.

And so now I venture to let the season preach to us, and to confine myself simply to suggesting for you one or two very plain and obvious thoughts which may help to make our retrospect wise and useful. And there are two main considerations which I wish to submit. The first is—what we ought to be chiefly occupied with as we look back; and secondly, what the issue of such a retrospect ought to be.

I. With what we should be mainly occupied as we look back. Memory, like all other faculties, may either help us or hinder us. As is the man, so will be his remembrance. The tastes which rule his present will determine the things that he likes best to think about in the past. There are many ways of going wrong in our retrospects. Some of us, for instance, prefer to think with pleasure about things that ought never to have been done, and to give a wicked immortality to thoughts that ought never to have had a being. Some men's tastes and inclinations are so vitiated and corrupted that they find a joy in living their badnesses over again. Some of us, looking back on the days that are gone, select by instinctive preference for remembrance, the vanities and frivolities and trifles which were the main things in them whilst they lasted. Such

a use of the great faculty of memory is like the folly of the Egyptians who embalmed cats and vermin. Do not let us be of those, who have in their memories nothing but rubbish, or something worse, who let down the drag-net into the depths of the past and bring it up full only of mud and foulnesses, and of ugly monsters that never ought to have been dragged into the daylight.

Then there are some of us who abuse memory just as much by picking out, with perverse ingenuity, every black bit that lies in the distance behind us, all the disappointments, all the losses, all the pains, all the sorrows. Some men look back and say, with Jacob in one of his moods, 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life!' Yes! and the same man, when he was in a better spirit, said, and a great deal more truly, 'The God that fed me all my life long, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' Do not paint like Rembrandt, even if you do not paint like Turner. Do not dip your brush only in the blackness, even if you cannot always dip it in molten sunshine.

And there are some of us who, in like manner, spoil all the good that we could get out of a wise retrospect, by only looking back in such a fashion as to feed a sentimental melancholy, which is, perhaps, the most profitless of all the ways of looking backwards.

Now here are the two points, in this verse of my text, which would put all these blunders and all others right, telling us what we should chiefly think about when we look back, and from what point of view the retrospect of the past must be taken in order that it should be salutary. 'Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee.' Let memory work under the distinct recognition of divine guidance

in every part of the past. That is the *first* condition of making the retrospect blessed. 'To humble thee and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no'; let us look back with a clear recognition of the fact that the use of life is to test, and reveal, and to make, character. This world, and all its outward engagements, duties, and occupations, is but a scaffolding, on which the builders may stand to rear the true temple, and when the building is reared you may do what you like with the scaffolding. So we have to look back on life from this point of view, that its joys and sorrows, its ups and downs, its work and repose, the vicissitudes and sometimes contrariety of its circumstances and conditions, are all for the purpose of making *us*, and of making plain to ourselves, what we are. 'To humble thee,' that is, to knock the self-confidence out of us, and to bring us to say: 'I am nothing and Thou art everything; I myself am a poor weak rag of a creature that needs Thy hand to stiffen me, or I shall not be able to resist or to do.' That is one main lesson that life is meant to teach us. Whoever has learnt to say by reason of the battering and shocks of time, by reason of sorrows and failures, by reason of joys, too, and fruition,—'Lord, I come to Thee as depending upon Thee for everything,' has wrung its supreme good out of life, and has fulfilled the purpose of the Father, who has led us all these years, to humble us into the wholesome diffidence that says: 'Not in myself, but in Thee are all my strength and my hope.'

I need not do more than remind you of the other cognate purposes which are suggested here. Life is meant, not only to bring us to humble self-distrust, as a step towards devout dependence on God, but also to

reveal us to ourselves; for we only know what we are by reflecting on what we have done, and the only path by which self-knowledge can be attained is the path of observant recollection of our conduct in daily life.

Another purpose for which the whole panorama of life is made to pass before us, and for which all the gymnastic of life exercises us, is that we may be made submissive to the great Will, and may keep His commandments.

These thoughts should be with us in our retrospect, and then our retrospect will be blessed: First, we are to look back and see God's guidance everywhere, and second, we are to judge of the things that we remember by their tendency to make character, to make us humble, to reveal us to ourselves, and to knit us in glad obedience to our Father God.

II. And now turn to the other consideration which may help to make remembrance a good, viz., the issues to which our retrospect must tend, if it is to be anything more than sentimental recollection.

First, let me say: Remember and be thankful. If what I have been saying as to the standard by which events are to be tried be true; if it be the case that the main fact about things is their power to mould persons and to make character, then there follows, very plainly and clearly, that all things that come within the sweep of our memory may equally contribute to our highest good.

Good does not mean pleasure. Bright-being may not always be well-being, and the highest good has a very much nobler meaning than comfort and satisfaction. And so, realising the fact that the best of things is that they shall make us like God, then we can turn to the past and judge it wisely, because then we shall see that

all the diversity, and even the opposition, of circumstances and events, may co-operate towards the same end. Suppose two wheels in a great machine, one turns from right to left and the other from left to right, but they fit into one another, and they both produce one final result of motion. So the moments in my life which I call blessings and gladness, and the moments in my life which I call sorrows and tortures, may work into each other, and they will do so if I take hold of them rightly, and use them as they ought to be used. They will tend to the highest good whether they be light or dark; even as night with its darkness and its dews has its ministration and mission of mercy for the wearied eye no less than day with its brilliancy and sunshine; even as the summer and the winter are equally needful, and equally good for the crop. So in our lives it is good for us, sometimes, that we be brought into the dark places; it is good for us sometimes that the leaves be stripped from the trees, and the ground be bound with frost.

And so for both kinds of weather, dear brethren, we have to remember and be thankful. It is a hard lesson, I know, for some of us. There may be some listening to me whose memory goes back to this dying year as the year that has held the sorest sorrow of their lives; to whom it has brought some loss that has made earth dark. And it seems hard to tell quivering lips to be thankful, and to bid a man be grateful though his eyes fill with tears as he looks back on such a past. But yet it is true that it is good for us to be drawn, or to be driven, to Him; it is good for us to have to tread even a lonely path if it makes us lean more on the arm of our Beloved. It is good for us to have places made empty if, as in the year when Israel's King died, we

shall thereby have our eyes purged to behold the Lord sitting on the Royal Seat.

‘Take it on trust a little while,
Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,
In the full sunshine of His smile.’

And for the present let us try to remember that He dwelleth in the darkness as in the light, and that we are to be thankful for the things that help us to be near Him, and not only for the things that make us outwardly glad. So I venture to say even to those of you who may be struggling with sad remembrances, remember and be thankful.

I have no doubt there are many of us who have to look back, if not upon a year desolated by some blow that never can be repaired, yet upon a year in which failing resources and declining business, or diminished health, or broken spirits, or a multitude of minute but most disturbing cares and sorrows, do make it hard to recognise the loving Hand in all that comes. Yet to such, too, I would say: ‘All things work together for good,’ therefore all things are to be embraced in the thankfulness of our retrospect.

The second and simple practical suggestion that I make is this: Remember, and let the memory lead to contrition. Perhaps I am speaking to some men or women for whom this dying year holds the memory of some great lapse from goodness; some young man who for the first time has been tempted to sensuous sin; some man who may have been led into slippery places in regard to business integrity. I draw a ‘bow at a venture’ when I speak of such things—perhaps some one is listening to me who would give a great deal if he or she could forget a certain past moment of this

dying year, which makes their cheeks hot yet whilst they think of it. To such I say: Remember, go close into the presence of the black thing, and get the consciousness of it driven into your heart; for such remembrance is the first step to deliverance from the load, and to your passing, emancipated from the bitterness, into the year that lies before you.

But even if there are none of us to whom such remarks would specially apply, let us summon up to ourselves the memories of these bygone days. In all the three hundred and sixty-five of them, my friend, how many moments stand out distinct before you as moments of high communion with God? How many times can you remember of devout consecration to Him? How many, when—as visitors to the Riviera reckon the number of days in the season in which, far across the water, they have seen Corsica—you can remember this year to have beheld, faint and far away, ‘the mountains that are round about’ the ‘Jerusalem that is above’? How many moments do you remember of consecration and service, of devotion to your God and your fellows? Oh! what a miserable, low-lying stretch of God-forgetting monotony our lives look when we are looking back at them in the mass. One film of mist is scarcely perceptible, but when you get a mile of it you can tell what it is—oppressive darkness. One drop of muddy water does not show its pollution, but when you have a pitcherful of it you can see how thick it is. And so a day or an hour looked back upon may not reveal the true godlessness of the average life, but if you will take the twelvemonth and think about it, and ask yourself a question or two about it, I think you will feel that the only attitude for any of us in looking back across a stretch of such brown barren

moorland is that of penitent prayer for forgiveness and for cleansing.

But I dare say that some of you say: 'Oh! I look back and I do not feel anything of that kind of regret that you describe; I have done my duty, and nobody can blame me. I am quite comfortable in my retrospect. Of course there have been imperfections; we are all human, and these need not trouble a man.' Let me ask you, dear brother, one question: Do you believe that the law of a man's life is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself'? Do you believe that that is what you ought to do? Have you done it? If you have not, let me beseech you not to go out of this year, across the artificial and imaginary boundary that separates you from the next, with the old guilt upon your back, but go to Jesus Christ, and ask Him to forgive you, and then you may pass into the coming twelvemonth without the intolerable burden of unremembered, unconfessed, and therefore unforgiven, sin.

The next point that I would suggest is this: Let us remember in order that from the retrospect we may gain practical wisdom. It is astonishing what unteachable, untamable creatures men are. They learn wisdom about all the little matters of daily life by experience, but they do not seem to do so about the higher. Even a sparrow comes to understand a scarecrow after a time or two, and any rat in a hole will learn the trick of a trap. But you can trick men over and over again with the same inducement, and, even whilst the hook is sticking in their jaws, the same bait will tempt them once more. That is very largely the case because they

do not observe and remember what has happened to them in bygone days.

There are two things that any man, who will bring his reason and common-sense to bear upon the honest estimate and retrospect of the facts of his life, may be fully convinced of. These are, first, his own weakness. One main use of a wise retrospect is to teach us where we are weakest. What an absurd thing it would be if the inhabitants of a Dutch village were to let the sea come in at the same gap in the same dyke a dozen times! What an absurd thing it would be if a city were captured over and over again by assaults at the same point, and did not strengthen its defences there! But that is exactly what you do; and all the while, if you would only think about your own past lives wisely and reasonably, and like men with brains in your heads, you might find out where it was that you were most open to attack; what it was in your character that most needed strengthening, what it was wherein the devil caught you most quickly, and might so build yourselves up in the most defenceless points.

Do not look back for sentimental melancholy; do not look back with unavailing regrets; do not look back to torment yourselves with useless self-accusation; but look back to see how good God has been, and look back to see where you are weak, and pile the wall higher there, and so learn practical wisdom from retrospect.

Another phase of the practical wisdom which memory should give is deliverance from the illusions of sense and time. Remember how little the world has ever done for you in bygone days. Why should you let it befool you once again? If it has proved itself a liar when it has tempted you with gilded offers that came to nothing, and with beauty that was no more solid

than the 'Easter-eggs' that you buy in the shops—painted sugar with nothing inside—why should you believe it when it comes to you once more? Why not say: 'Ah! once burnt, twice shy! You have tried that trick on me before, and I have found it out!' Let the retrospect teach us how hollow life is without God, and so let it draw us near to Him.

The last thing that I would say is: 'Let us remember that we may hope. It is the prerogative of Christian remembrance, that it merges into Christian hope. The forward look and the backward look are really but the exercise of the same faculty in two different directions. Memory does not always imply hope, we remember sometimes because we do not hope, and try to gather round ourselves the vanished past because we know it never again can be a present or a future. But when we are occupied with an unchanging Friend, whose love is inexhaustible, and whose arm is unwearied, it is good logic to say: 'It has been, therefore it shall be.'

With regard to this fleeting life, it is a delusion to say 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant'; but with regard to the life of the soul that lives in God, that is true, and true for ever. The past is a specimen of the future. The future for the man who lives in Christ is but the prolongation, and the heightening into superlative excellence and beauty, of all that is good in the past and in the present. As the radiance of some rising sun may cast its bright beams into the opposite sky, even so the glowing past behind us flings its purples and its golds and its scarlets on to the else dim curtain of the future.

Remember that you may hope. A paradox, but a paradox that is a truth in the case of Christians whose memory is of a God that has loved and blessed them;

whose hope is in a God that changes never; whose memory is charged with 'every good and perfect gift that came down from the Father of Lights,' whose hope is in that same Father, 'with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning.' So on every stone of remembrance, every Ebenezer on which is graved: 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' we can mount a telescope—if I may so say—that will look into the furthest glories of the heavens, and be sure that the past will be magnified and perpetuated in the future. Our prayer may legitimately be: 'Thou hast been my help, leave me not, neither forsake me!' And His answer will be: 'I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.' Remember that you may hope, and hope because you remember.

THE EATING OF THE PEACE-OFFERING

'But thou must eat them before the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.'—DEUT. xii. 18.

THERE were three bloody sacrifices, the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering. In all three expiation was the first idea, but in the second of them the act of burning symbolised a further thought, namely, that of offering to God, while in the third, the peace-offering, there was added to both of these the still further thought of the offerer's participation with God, as symbolised by the eating of the sacrifice. So we have great verities of the most spiritual religion adumbrated in this external rite. The rind is hard and forbidding, the kernel is juicy and sweet.

I. Communion with God based on atonement.

II. Feeding on Christ.

What was sacrifice becomes food. The same Person and facts, apprehended by faith, are, in regard to their bearing on the divine government, the ground of pardon, and in regard to their operation within us, the source of spiritual sustenance. Christ for us is our pardon; Christ in us is our life.

III. The restoration to the offerer of all which he lays on God's altar.

The sacrifice was transformed and elevated into a sacrament. By being offered the sacrifice was ennobled. The offerer did not lose what he laid on the altar, but it came back to him, far more precious than before. It was no longer mere food for the body, and to eat it became not an ordinary meal, but a sacrament and means of union with God. It was a hundredfold more the offerer's even in this life. All its savour was more savoury, all its nutritive qualities were more nutritious. It had suffered a fiery change, and was turned into something more rich and rare.

That is blessedly true as to all which we lay on God's altar. It is far more ours than it ever was or could be, while we kept it for ourselves, and our enjoyment of, and nourishment from, our good things, when offered as sacrifices, are greater than when we eat our morsel alone. If we make earthly joys and possessions the materials of our sacrifice, they will not only become more joyful and richer, but they will become means of closer union with Him, instead of parting us from Him, as they do when used in selfish disregard of Him.

Nor must we forget the wonderful thought, also mirrored in this piece of ancient ritual, that God delights in men's sacrifices and surrenders and services. 'If I were hungry, I would not tell thee,' said the

Psalmist in God's name in regard to outward sacrifices; 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?' But he does 'eat' the better sacrifices that loving hearts or obedient wills lay on His altar. He seeks for these, and delights when they are offered to Him. 'He hungered, and seeing a fig tree by the wayside, He came to it.' He still hungers for the fruit that we can yield to Him, and if we will, He will enter in and sup with us, not disdaining to sit at the poor table which we can spread for Him, nor to partake of the humble fare which we can lay upon it, but mending the banquet by what He brings for *our* nourishment, and hallowing the hour by His presence.

PROPHETS AND THE PROPHET

'When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. 10. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, 11. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. 12. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. 13. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. 14. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. 15. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken; 16. According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 17. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. 18. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him. 19. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him. 20. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. 21. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? 22. When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.'—DEUT. xviii. 9-22.

It is evident from the connection in which the promise of 'a prophet like unto Moses' is here introduced that

it does not refer to Jesus only; for it is presented as Israel's continuous defence against the temptation of seeking knowledge of the divine will by the illegitimate methods of divination, soothsaying, necromancy, and the like, which were rampant among the inhabitants of the land. A distant hope of a prophet in the far-off future could afford no motive to shun these superstitions. We cannot understand this passage unless we recognise that the direct reference is to the institution of the prophetic order as the standing means of imparting the reliable knowledge of God's will, possessing which, Israel had no need to turn to them 'that peep and mutter' and bring false oracles from imagined gods. But that primary reference of the words does not exclude, but rather demands, their ultimate reference to Him in whom the divine word is perfectly enshrined, and who is the bright, consummate flower of the prophetic order, which 'spake of Him,' not only in its individual predictions, but by its very existence.

A glance must be given to the exhaustive list of pretenders to knowledge of the future or to power of shaping it magically, which occurs in verses 10, 11, and suggests a terrible picture of the burdens of superstition which weighed on men in these days of ignorance, as the like burdens do still, wherever Jesus is not known as the one Revealer of God, and the sole Lord of all things. Of the eight terms employed, the first three refer to different means of reading the future, the next two to different means of influencing events, and the last three to different ways of consulting the dead. The first of these eight properly refers to drawing lots, but includes other methods; the second is an obscure word, which is supposed by some to mean a 'murmurer,' and may refer rather to the low mutterings of the

soothsayer than to the method of his working; the third is probably a general expression for an interpreter of omens, especially of those given by the play of liquid in a 'cup,' such as Joseph 'divined' by.

Two names for magicians follow, of which the former seems to mean one who worked with charms such as African or American Indian 'medicine men' use, and the latter, one who binds by incantations, or one who ties magic knots, which are supposed to have the power of hindering the designs of the person against whom they are directed. The word employed means 'binding,' and may be used either literally or metaphorically. The malicious tying of knots in order to work harm is not dead yet in some backward corners of Britain. Then follow three names for traffickers with spirits,—those who raise ghosts as did the witch of Endor, those who have a 'familiar spirit,' and those who in any way consult the dead. It is a grim catalogue, bearing witness to the deep-rooted longing in men to peer into the darkness ahead, and to get some knowledge of the purposes of the awful unseen Power who rules there. The longing is here recognised as legitimate, while the methods are branded as bad, and Israel is warned from them, by being pointed to the merciful divine institution which meets the longing.

It is clear, from this glance at the context, that the 'prophet' promised to Israel must mean the order, not the individual; and it is interesting to note, first, the relation in which that order is presented as standing towards all that rabble of diviners and sorcerers, with their rubbish of charms and muttered spells. It sweeps them off the field, because it is truly what they pretend to be. God knows men's longings, and God will meet them so far as meeting them is for men's good. But

the characteristics of the prophet are set in strong contrast to those of the diviners and magicians, and lift the order high above all the filth and folly of these others. First, the prophet is 'raised up' by God; the individual holder of the office has his 'call' and does not 'prophesy out of his own heart.' The man who takes this office on himself without such a call is *ipso facto* branded as a false prophet. Then he is 'from the midst of thee, of thy brethren,'—springing from the people, not an alien, like so many of these wandering soothsayers, but with the national life throbbing in his veins, and himself participant of the thoughts and emotions of his brethren. Then he is to be 'like unto' Moses,—not in all points, but in his receiving direct communications from God, and in his authority as God's messenger. The crowning characteristic, 'I will put My words into his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him,' invests his words with divine authority, calls for obedience to them as the words of God Himself, widens out his sphere far beyond that of merely foretelling, brings in the moral and religious element which had no place in the oracles of the soothsayer, and opens up the prospect of a continuous progressive revelation throughout the ages ('all that I *shall* command him'). We mutilate the grand idea of the prophet in Israel if we think of his work as mainly prediction, and we mutilate it no less if we exclude prediction from it. We mutilate it still more fatally if we try to account for it on naturalistic principles, and fail to see in the prophet a man directly conscious of a divine call, or to hear in his words the solemn accents of the voice of God.

The loftiness and the limitations of 'the goodly fellowship of the prophets' alike point onwards to

Jesus Christ. In Him, and in Him alone, the idea of the prophet is fully realised. The imperfect embodiments of it in the past were prophecies as well as prophets. The fact that God has 'spoken unto the fathers by the prophets,' leads us to expect that He will speak 'to us in a Son,' and that not by fragments of His mighty voice, but in one full, eternal, all-embracing and all-sufficient Word. Every divine idea, which has been imperfectly manifested in fragmentary and sinful men and in the material creation, is completely incarnated in Him. He is the King to whom the sins and the saintlinesses of Israel's kings alike pointed. He is the Priest, whom Aaron and his sons foreshadowed, who perfectly exercises the sympathy which they could only feel partially, because they were compassed with infirmity and self-regard, and who offers the true sacrifice of efficacy higher than 'the blood of bulls and goats.' He is the Prophet, who makes all other means of knowing the divine will unnecessary, hearing whom we hear the very voice of God speaking in His gentle words of love, in His authoritative words of command, in His illuminating words of wisdom, and speaking yet more loudly and heart-touchingly in the eloquence of deeds no less than divine; who is 'not ashamed to call us brethren,' and is 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'; who is like, but greater than, the great lawgiver of Israel, being the Son and Lord of the 'house' in which Moses was but a servant. 'To Him give all the prophets witness,' and the greatest of them was honoured when, with Moses, Elijah stood on the Mount of Transfiguration, subordinate and attesting, and then faded away when the voice proclaimed, 'This is My beloved Son, hear Him,'—and they 'saw no one save Jesus only.'

A CHOICE OF MASTERS

'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; 43. Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies . . . in want of all things: and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until He have destroyed thee.'—DEUT. xxviii. 47, 48.

THE history of Israel is a picture on the large scale of what befalls every man.

A service—we are all born to obedience, to depend on and follow some person or thing. There is only a choice of services; and he who boasts himself free is but a more abject slave, as the choice for a nation is either the rule of settled order and the sanctities of an established law, or the usurpation of a mob and the intolerable tyranny of unbridled and irresponsible force.

I. The service of God or the service of our enemies.

Israel was the servant in turn of Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Rome. It was every invader's prey. God's invisible arm was its only guard from these, and an all-sufficient guard as long as it leaned on Him. When it turned from Him it fell under their yoke. Its lawful Lord loved it; its tyrants hated it.

So with us. We have to serve God or enemies. Our lusts, our passions, the world, evil habits—in a word, our sins ring us round. God is the only defence against them.

The contrast between the one and the many—a king or an ochlocracy. The contrast of the loving Lord and the hostile sins.

II. A service which is honour or a service which is degradation.

God alone is worthy of our absolute submission and service. How low a man sinks when he is ruled by any lesser authority! Such obedience is a crime against the dignity of human nature, and the soul is not without a galling sense of this now and then, when its chains rattle.

III. A service which is freedom because it is rendered by love, or a service which is hard slavery.

‘With joy for the abundance of all things.’ How sin palls upon us, and yet we commit it. The will is overborne, conscience is stifled.

IV. A service which feeds the spirit or a service which starves it.

The soul can only in God get what it wants. Prison fare is what it receives in the other service. The unsatisfying character of all sin; it cloy, and yet leaves one hungry. It is ‘that which satisfieth not.’ ‘Broken cisterns which hold no water.’

V. A service which is life or a service which is death.

The dark forebodings of the text grow darker as it goes on. The grim slavery which it threatens as the only alternative to joyful service of God is declared to be lifelong ‘penal servitude,’ and not only is there no deliverance from it, but it directly tends to wear away the life of the hopeless slaves. For the words that follow our text are ‘and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.’ That is dismally true in regard to any and every life that has shaken off the service of God which is perfect freedom, and has persisted in the service of sin. Such service is suicidal; it rivets an iron yoke on our necks, and there is no locksmith who can undo the shackles and lift it off, so long as we refuse to take service with God. Stubbornly rebellious wills forge their own

fetters. Like many a slave-owner, our tyrants have a cruel delight in killing their slaves, and our sins not only lead to death, but are themselves death.

But there is a bright possibility before the most down-trodden vassal of sin. 'The bond-servant abideth not in the house for ever.' He is not a son of the house, but has been brought into it, stolen from his home. He may be carried back to his Father's house, and there 'have bread enough and to spare,' if a deliverer can be found. And He has been found. Christ the Son makes us free, and if we trust Him for our emancipation we 'shall be free indeed,' 'that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.'

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

'For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. 12. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 13. Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. 15. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; 16. In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. 17. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; 18. I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. 19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20. That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for He is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.'—DEUT. xxx. 11-20.

THIS paragraph closes the legislation of this book, the succeeding chapters being in the nature of an epilogue or appendix. It sums up the whole law, makes plain

its inmost essence and its tremendous alternatives. As in the closing strains of some great symphony, the themes which have run through the preceding movements are woven together in the final burst of music. Let us try to discover the component threads of the web.

The first point to note is the lofty conception of the true essence of the whole law, which is enshrined here. 'This commandment which I command thee this day' is twice defined in the section (vs. 16, 20), and in both instances 'to love Jehovah thy God' is presented as the all-important precept. Love is recognised as the great commandment. Leviticus may deal with minute regulations for worship, but these are subordinate, and the sovereign commandment is love. Nor is the motive which should sway to love omitted; for what a tender drawing by the memories of what He had done for Israel is put forth in the name of 'Jehovah, *thy* God!' The Old Testament system is a spiritual system, and it too places the very heart of religion in love to God, drawn out by the contemplation of his self-revelation in his loving dealings with us. We have here clearly recognised that the obedience which pleases God is obedience born of love, and that the love which really sets towards God will, like a powerful stream, turn all the wheels of life in conformity to His will. When Paul proclaimed that 'love is the fulfilling of the law,' he was only repeating the teaching of this passage, when it puts 'to walk in His ways,' or 'to obey His voice,' after 'to love Jehovah thy God.' Obedience is the result and test of love; love is the only parent of real obedience.

The second point strongly insisted on here is the blessedness of possessing such a knowledge as the law gives. Verses 11-14 present that thought in three

ways. The revelation is not that of duties far beyond our capacity: 'It is not too hard for thee.' No doubt, complete conformity with it is beyond our powers, and entire, whole-hearted, and whole-souled love of God is not attained even by those who love Him most. Paul's position that the law gives the knowledge of sin, just because it presents an impossible elevation in its ideal, is not opposed to the point of view of this context; for he is thinking of complete conformity as impossible, while it is thinking of real, though imperfect, obedience as within the reach of all men. No man can love as he ought; every man can love. It is blessed to have our obligations all gathered into such a commandment.

Again, the possession of the law is a blessing, because its authoritative voice ends the weary quest after some reliable guide to conduct, and we need neither try to climb to heaven, nor to traverse the wide world and cross the ocean, to find certitude and enlightenment enough for our need. They err who think of God's commandments as grievous burdens; they are merciful guide-posts. They do not so much lay weights on our backs as give light to our eyes.

Still further, the law has its echo 'in thy heart.' It is 'graven on the fleshly tables of the heart,' and we all respond to it when it gathers up all duty into 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' and our consciences say to it, 'Thou speakest well.' The worst man knows it better than the best man keeps it. Blurred and illegible often, like the half-defaced inscriptions disinterred from the rubbish mounds that once were Nineveh or Babylon, that law remains written on the hearts of all men.

A further point to be well laid to heart is the

merciful plainness and emphasis with which the issues that are suspended on obedience or disobedience are declared. The solemn alternatives are before every man that hears. Life or death, blessing or cursing, are held out to him, and it is for him to elect which shall be realised in his case. Of course, it may be said that the words 'life' and 'death' are here used in their merely physical sense, and that the context shows (vs. 17, 18) that life here means only 'length of days, that thou mayest dwell in the land.' No doubt that is so, though we can scarcely refuse to see some glimmer of a deeper conception gleaming through the words, 'He is thy life,' though it is but a glimmer. We have no space here to enter upon the question of how far it is now true that obedience brings material blessings. It was true for Israel, as many a sad experience that it was a bitter as well as an evil thing to forsake Jehovah was to show in the future. But though the connection between well-doing and material gain is not so clear now, it is by no means abrogated, either for nations or for individuals. Moral and religious law has social and economic consequences, and though the perplexed distribution of earthly good and ill often bewilders faith and emboldens scepticism, there still is visible in human affairs a drift towards recompensing in the world the righteous and the wicked.

But to us, with our Christian consciousness, 'life' means more than living, and 'He is our life' in a deeper and more blessed sense than that our physical existence is sustained by His continual energy. The love of God and consequent union with Him give us the only true life. Jesus is 'our life,' and He enters the spirit which opens to Him by faith, and communicates to it a spark of His own immortal life. He that is joined to Jesus

lives; he that is separated from Him 'is dead while he liveth.'

The last point here is the solemn responsibility for choosing one's part, which the revelation of the law brings with it. 'I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse, therefore choose life.' We each determine for ourselves whether the knowledge of what we ought to be will lead to life or to death, and by choosing obedience we choose life. Every ray of light from God is capable of producing a double effect. It either gladdens or pains, it either gives vision or blindness. The gospel, which is the perfect revelation of God in Christ, brings every one of us face to face with the great alternative, and urgently demands from each his personal act of choice whether he will accept it or neglect or reject it. Not to choose to accept is to choose to reject. To do nothing is to choose death. The knowledge of the law was not enough, and neither is an intellectual reception of the gospel. The one bred Pharisees, who were 'whited sepulchres'; the other breeds orthodox professors, who have 'a name to live and are dead.' The clearer our light, the heavier our responsibility. If we are to live, we have to 'choose life'; and if we do not, by the vigorous exercise of our will, turn away from earth and self, and take Jesus for our Saviour and Lord, loving and obeying whom we love and obey God, we have effectually chosen a worse death than that of the body, and flung away a better life than that of earth.

GOD'S TRUE TREASURE IN MAN

'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'—DEUT. xxxii. 9.

'Jesus Christ (Who) gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people.'—TITUS ii. 14.

I CHOOSE these two texts because they together present us with the other side of the thought to that which I have elsewhere considered, that man's true treasure is in God. That great axiom of the religious consciousness, which pervades the whole of Scripture, is rapturously expressed in many a psalm, and never more assuredly than in that one which struggles up from the miry clay in which the Psalmist's 'steps had well-nigh slipped' and soars and sings thus: 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; Thou maintainest my lot,' 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

You observe the correspondence between these words and those of my first text: 'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.' The correspondence in the original is not quite so marked as it is in our Authorised Version, but still the idea in the two passages is the same. Now it is plain that persons can possess persons only by love, sympathy, and communion. From that it follows that the possession must be mutual; or, in other words, that only he can say 'Thou art mine' who can say 'I am Thine.' And so to possess God, and to be possessed by God, are but two ways of putting the same fact. 'The Lord is the portion of His people, and the Lord's portion is His people,' are only two ways of stating the same truth.

Then my second text clearly quotes the well-known utterance that lies at the foundation of the national

life of Israel: 'Ye shall be unto Me a peculiar treasure above all people,' and claims that privilege, like all Israel's privileges, for the Christian Church. In like manner Peter (1 Pet. ii. 9) quotes the same words, 'a peculiar people,' as properly applying to Christians. I need scarcely remind you that 'peculiar' here is used in its proper original sense of belonging to, or, as the Revised Version gives it, 'a people for God's own possession,' and has no trace of the modern signification of 'singular.' Similarly we find Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians giving both sides of the idea of the inheritance in intentional juxtaposition, when he speaks (i. 14) of the 'earnest of our inheritance . . . unto the redemption of God's own possession.' In the words before us we have the same idea; and this text besides tells us how Christ, the Revealer of God, wins men for Himself, and what manner of men they must be whom He counts as His.

Therefore there are, as I take it, three things to be spoken about now. First, God has a special ownership in some people. Second, God owns these people because He has given Himself to them. Third, God possesses, and is possessed by, His inheritance, that He may give and receive services of love. Or, in briefer words, I have to speak about this wonderful thought of a special divine ownership, what it rests upon, and what it involves.

I. God has special ownership in some people.

'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.' Put side by side with those other words of the Old Testament: 'All souls are Mine,' or the utterance of the 100th Psalm rightly translated: 'It is He that hath made us, and to Him we belong.' There is a right of absolute and utter ownership and possession

inherent in the very relation of Creator and creature; so that the being made is wholly and altogether at the disposal, and is the property, of Him that makes him.

But is that enough for God's heart? Is that worth calling ownership at all? An arbitrary tyrant in an unconstitutional kingdom, or a slave-owner, may have the most absolute right of property over his subject or his slave; may have the right of entire disposal of all his industry, of the profit of all his labour; may be able to do anything he likes with him, may have the power of life and death; but such ownership is only of the husk and case of a man: the man himself may be free, and may smile at the claim of possession. 'They may' *own* 'the body, and after that have no more than they can do.' That kind of authority and ownership, absolute and utter, to the point of death, may satisfy a tyrant or a slave-driver, it does not satisfy the loving heart of God. It is not real possession at all. In what sense did Nero own Paul when he shut him up in prison, and cut his head off? Does the slave-owner own the man whom he whips within an inch of his life, and who dare not do anything without his permission? Does God, in any sense that corresponds with the longing of infinite love, own the men that reluctantly obey Him, and are simply, as it were, tools in His hands? He covets and longs for a deeper relationship and tenderer ties, and though all creatures are His, and all men are His servants and His possession, yet, like certain regiments in our own British army, there are some who have the right to bear in a special manner on their uniform and on their banners the emblazonment, 'The King's Own.' 'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'

Well, then, the next thought is that the special

relationship of possession is constituted by mutual love. I said at the beginning of these remarks that as concerns men's relations, the only real possession is through love, sympathy, and communion, and that that must necessarily be mutual. We have a perfect right to apply the human analogy here; in fact, we are bound to do it if we would rightly understand such words as those of my text; and it just leads us to this, that the one thing whereby God reckons that He possesses a man at all is when His love falls upon that man's heart and soaks into it, and when there springs up in the heart a corresponding emotion and affection. The men who welcome the divine love that goes through the whole world, seeking such to worship it, and to trust it, and to become its own; and who therefore lovingly yield to the loving divine will, and take it for their law—these are the men whom He regards as His 'portion' and 'the lot of His inheritance.' So that God is mine, and that 'I am God's,' are two ends of one truth; 'I possess Him,' and 'I am possessed by Him,' are but the statement of one fact expressed from two points of view. In the one case you look upon it from above, in the other case you look upon it from beneath. All the sweet commerce of mutual surrender and possession which makes the joy of our hearts, in friendship and in domestic life, we have the right to lift up into this loftier region, and find in it the last teaching of what makes the special bond of mutual possession between God and man.

And deep words of Scripture point in that direction. Those parables of our Lord's: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, in their infinite beauty, whilst they contain a great deal besides this, do contain this in their several ways; the money, the animal, the man

belong to the woman of the house, to the shepherd, to the father. Each is 'lost' in a different fashion, but the most clear revelation is given in the last parable of the three, which explains the other two. The son was 'lost,' when he did not love the father; and he was 'found' by the father when he returned the yearning of the father's heart.

And so, dear brethren, it ever is; the one thing that knits men to God is that the silken cord of love let down from Heaven should by our own hand be wrapped round our own hearts, and then we are united to Him. We are His and He is ours by the double action of His love manifested by Him, and His love received by us.

Now there is nothing in all that of favouritism. The declaration that there are people who have a special relationship to the divine heart may be so stated as to have a very ugly look, and it often has been so stated as to be nothing more than self-complacent Pharisaism, which values a privilege principally because its possession is an insult to somebody else that has it not.

There has been plenty of Christianity of that sort in the world, but there is nothing of it in the thoughts of these texts rightly looked at. There is only this: it cannot but be that men who yield to God and love Him, and try to live near Him and to do righteousness, are His in a manner that those who steel themselves against Him and turn away from Him are not. Whilst all creatures have a place in His heart, and are flooded with His benefits, and get as much of Him as they can hold, the men who recognise the source of their blessing, and turn to it with grateful hearts, are nearer Him than those that do not do so. Let us take care, lest for the sake of seeming to preserve the impartiality of His love, we have destroyed all in Him that makes His love

worth having. If to Him the good and the bad, the men who fear Him and the men who fear Him not, are equally satisfactory, and, in the same manner, the objects of an equal love, then He is not a God that has pleasure in righteousness; and if He is not a God that 'has pleasure in righteousness,' He is not a God for us to trust to. We are not giving countenance to the notion that God has any step-children, any petted members of His family, when we cleave to this—they that have welcomed His love into their hearts are nearer to Him than those that have closed the door against it.

And there is one more point here about this matter of ownership on which I dwell for a moment, namely, that this conception of certain men being in a special sense God's possession and inheritance means also that He has a special delight in, and lofty appreciation of, them. All this material creation exists for the sake of growing good men and women. That is the use of the things that are seen and temporal; they are like greenhouses built for the great Gardener's use in striking and furthering the growth of His plants; and when He has got the plants He has got what He wanted, and you may pull the greenhouse down if you like. And so God estimates, and teaches us to estimate, the relative value and greatness of the material and the spiritual in this fashion, that He says to us in effect: 'All these magnificences and magnitudes round you are small and vulgar as compared with this—a heart in which wisdom and divine truth and the love and likeness of God have attained to some tolerable measure of maturity and of strength.' These are His 'jewels,' as the Roman matron said about her two boys. The great Father looks upon the men that love Him as His jewels, and, having got the jewels, the rock in which

they were embedded and preserved may be crushed when you like. 'They shall be Mine,' saith the Lord, 'My treasures in that day of judgment which I make.'

And so, my brother, all the insignificance of man, as compared with the magnitude and duration of the universe, need not stagger our faith that the divinest thing in the universe is a heart that has learnt to love God and aspires after Him, and should but increase our wonder and our gratitude that He has been mindful of man and has visited him, in order that He might give Himself to men, and so might win men for Himself.

II. That brings me, and very briefly, to the other points that I desire to deal with now. The second one, which is suggested to us from my second text in the Epistle to Titus, is that this possession, by God, of man, like man's possession of God, comes because God has given Himself to man.

The Apostle puts it very strongly in the Epistle to Titus: 'The glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might purify unto Himself a *people for a possession*.' Israel, according to one metaphor, was God's 'son,' begotten by that great redeeming act of deliverance from the captivity of Egypt (Deut. xxxii. 6-19). According to another metaphor, Israel was God's bride, wooed and won for His own by that same act. Both of these figures point to the thought that in order to get man for His own He has to give Himself to man.

And the very height and sublimity of that truth is found in the Christian fact which the Apostle points to here. We need not depart from human analogies here

either. Christ gave Himself to us that He might acquire us for Himself. Absolute possession of others is only possible at the price of absolute surrender to them. No human heart ever gave itself away unless it was convinced that the heart to which it gave itself had given itself to it.

And on the lower levels of gratitude and obligation, the only thing that binds a man to another in utter submission is the conviction that that other has given himself in absolute sacrifice for him. A doctor goes into the wards of an hospital with his life in his hands, and because he does, he wins the full confidence and affection of those whom he treats. You cannot buy a heart with anything less than a heart. In the barter of the world it is not 'skin for skin,' but it is 'self for self'; and if you want to own me, you must give yourself altogether to me. And the measure in which teachers and guides and preachers and philanthropists of all sorts make conquests of men is the measure in which they make themselves sacrifices for men.

Now all that is true, and is lifted to its superlative truth, in the great central fact of the Christian faith. But there is more than human analogy here. Christ is not only self-sacrifice in the sense of surrender, but He is sacrifice in the sense of giving Himself for our redemption and forgiveness. He has not only given Himself to us, He has given Himself for us. And there, and on that, is builded, and on that alone has He a right to build, or have we a right to yield to it, His claim to absolute authority and utter command over each of us.

He has died for us, therefore the springs of our life are at His disposal; and the strongest motives which can sway our lives are set in motion by His touch. His

death, says this text, redeems us from iniquity and purifies us. That points to its power in delivering us from the service and practice of sin. He buys us from the despot whose slaves we were, and makes us His own in the hatred of evil and the doing of righteousness. Moved by His death, we become capable of heroisms and martyrdoms of devotion to Him. Brethren, it is only as that self-sacrificing love touches us, which died for our sins upon the Cross, that the diabolical chain of selfishness will be broken from our affections and our wills, and we shall be led into the large place of glad surrender of ourselves to the sweetness and the gentle authority of His omnipotent love.

III. The last thought that I suggest is the issues to which this mutual possession points. God owns men, and is owned by them, in order that there may be a giving and receiving of mutual services of love.

'The Lord's portion is His people.' That in the Old Testament is always laid as the foundation of certain obligations under which He has come, and which He will abundantly discharge. What is a great landlord expected to do to his estate? 'What ought I to have done to my vineyard?' the divine Proprietor asks through the mouth of His servant the prophet. He ought to till it, He ought not to starve it, He ought to fence it, He ought to cast a wall about it, He ought to reap the fruits. And He does all that for His inheritance. God's honour is concerned in His portion not being waste. It is not to be a 'garden of the sluggard,' by which people who pass can see the thorns growing there. So He will till it, He will plough it, He will pick out the weeds, and all the disciplines of life will come to us, and the ploughshare will be driven deep into the heart, that 'the peaceable fruit of righteous-

ness' may spring up. He will fence His vineyard. Round about His inheritance His hand will be cast, within His people His Spirit will dwell. No harm shall come near thee if thy love is given to Him; safe and untouched by evil thou shalt walk if thou walk with God. 'He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of Mine eye.' The soul that trusts Him He takes in charge, and before any evil can fall to it 'the pillared firmament must be rottenness, and earth be built on stubble.' 'He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' 'The Lord's portion is His people,' and 'none shall pluck them out of His hand.'

And on the other side, we belong to God in Christ. What do we owe Him? What does the vineyard owe the husbandman? Fruit. We are His, therefore we are bound to absolute submission. 'Ye are not your own.' Life, circumstances, occupations, all—we hold them at His will. We have no more right of property in anything than a slave in the bad old days had in his cabin and patch of ground. They belonged to the master to whom he belonged. Let us recognise our stewardship, and be glad to know ourselves His, and all events and things which we sometimes think ours, His also.

We are His, therefore we owe absolute trust. The slave has at least this blessing in his lot, that he need have no anxieties; nor need we. We belong to God, and He will take care of us. A rich man's horses and dogs are well cared for, and our Owner will not leave us unheeded. Our well-being involves His good name. Leave anxious thought to masterless hearts which have to front the world with nobody at their backs. If you are God's you will be looked after.

We are His, therefore we are bound to live to His praise. That is the conclusion which one Old Testament passage draws. 'This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise' (Isaiah xliii. 21). The Apostle Peter quotes these words immediately after those from Exodus, which describe Israel as 'a people for God's own possession,' when he says 'that ye should show forth the praise of Him who hath called you.' Let us, then, live to His glory, and remember that the servants of the King are bound to stand to their colours amid rebels, and that they who know the sweetness of possessing God, and the blessedness of yielding to His supreme control, should acknowledge what they have found of His goodness, and 'tell forth the honour of His name, and make His praise glorious.' Let not all the magnificent and wonderful expenditure of divine longing and love be in vain, nor run off your hearts like water poured upon a rock. Surely the sun's flames leaping leagues high, they tell us, in tongues of burning gas, must melt everything that is near them. Shall we keep our hearts sullen and cold before such a fire of love? Surely that superb and wonderful manifestation of the love of God in the Cross of Christ should melt into running rivers of gratitude all the ice of our hearts.

'He gave Himself for me!' Let us turn to Him and say: 'Lo! I give myself to Thee. Thou art mine. Make me Thine by the constraint of Thy love, so utterly, and so saturate my spirit with Thyself, that it shall not only be Thine, but in a very deep sense it shall be Thee, and that it may be "no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."' "

THE EAGLE AND ITS BROOD

'As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.'—DEUT. xxxii. 11.

THIS is an incomplete sentence in the Authorised Version, but really it should be rendered as a complete one; the description of the eagle's action including only the two first clauses, and (the figure being still retained) the person spoken of in the last clauses being God Himself. That is to say, it should read thus, 'As an eagle stirreth up his nest, fluttereth over his young, *He* spreads abroad His wings, takes them, bears them on His pinions.' That is far grander, as well as more compact, than the somewhat dragging comparison which, according to the Authorised Version, is spread over the whole verse and tardily explained, in the following, by a clause introduced by an unwarranted 'So'—'the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.'

Now, of course, we all know that the original reference of these words is to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and their training in the desert. In the solemn address by Jehovah at the giving of the law (Exodus xix. 4), the same metaphor is employed, and, no doubt, that passage was the source of the extended imagery here. There we read, 'Ye know what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself.' The meaning of the glowing metaphor, with its vivid details, is just that Jehovah brought Israel out of its fixed abode in Goshen, and trained it for mature national life by its varied desert experiences. As one of the prophets puts the same idea, 'I taught Ephraim to go,' where the figure of the parent bird training its callow fledglings for flight

is exchanged for that of the nurse teaching a child to walk. While, then, the text primarily refers to the experience of the infant nation in the forty years' wanderings, it carries large truths about us all; and sets forth the true meaning and importance of life. There seem to me to be three thoughts here, which I desire to touch on briefly: first, a great thought about God; then an illuminating thought about the true meaning and aspect of life; and lastly a calming thought about the variety of the methods by which God carries out our training.

I. Here is a great thought about God.

Now, it may come as something of a shock if I say that the bird that is selected for the comparison is not really the eagle, but one which, in our estimation, is of a very much lower order—viz. the carnivorous vulture. But a poetical emblem is not the less fitting, though, besides the points of resemblance, the thing which is so used has others less noble. Our modern repugnance to the vulture as feeding on carcasses was probably not felt by the singer of this song. What he brings into view are the characteristics common to the eagle and the vulture; superb strength in beak and claw, keenness of vision almost incredible, magnificent sweep of pinion and power of rapid, unwearied flight. And these characteristics, we may say, have their analogues in the divine nature, and the emblem not unfitly shadows forth one aspect of the God of Israel, who is 'fearful in praises,' who is strong to destroy as well as to save, whose all-seeing eye marks every foul thing, and who often pounces on it swiftly to rend it to pieces, though the sky seemed empty a moment before.

But the action described in the text is not destructive, terrible, or fierce. The monarch of the sky busies itself

with tender cares for its brood. Then, there is gentleness along with the terribleness. The strong beak and claw, the gaze that can see so far, and the mighty spread of wings that can lift it till it is an invisible speck in the blue vault, go along with the instinct of paternity: and the fledglings in the nest look up at the fierce beak and bright eyes, and know no terror. The impression of this blending of power and gentleness is greatly deepened, as it seems to me, if we notice that it is the male bird that is spoken about in the text, which should be rendered: 'As the eagle stirreth up *his* nest and fluttereth over *his* young.'

So we just come to the thought that we must keep the true balance between these two aspects of that great divine nature—the majesty, the terror, the awfulness, the soaring elevation, the all-penetrating vision, the power of the mighty pinion, one stroke of which could crush a universe into nothing; and, on the other side, the yearning instinct of Fatherhood, the love and gentleness, and all the tender ministries for us, His children, to which these lead. Brethren, unless we keep hold of both of these in due equipoise and inseparably intertwining, we damage the one which we retain almost as much as the one which we dismiss. For there is no love like the love that is strong, and can be fierce, and there is no condescension like the condescension of Him who is the Highest, in order that He may be, and because He is ready to be, the lowest. Modern tendencies, legitimately recoiling from the one-sidedness of a past generation, are now turning away far too much from the Old Testament conceptions of Jehovah, which are concentrated in that metaphor of the vulture in the sky. And thereby we destroy the love, in the name of which we scout the wrath.

‘Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.’

‘As the vulture stirreth up his nest,’—that is the Old Testament revelation of the terribleness and gentleness of Jehovah. ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing?’—that is the New Testament modification of the image. But you never could have had the New unless you first had had the Old. And you are a foolish man if, in the name of the sanctity of the New, you cast away the teaching of the Old. Keep both the metaphors, and they will explain and confirm each other.

II. Here we have an illuminating thought of the meaning of life.

What is it all for? To teach us to fly, to exercise our half-fledged wings in short flights, that may prepare us for, and make it possible to take, longer ones. Every event that befalls us has a meaning beyond itself; and every task that we have to do reacts upon us, the doers, and either fits or hinders us for larger work. Life as a whole, and in its minutest detail, is worthy of God to give, and worthy of us to possess, only if we recognise the teaching that is put into picturesque form in this text—that the meaning of all which God does to us is to train us for something greater yonder. Life as a whole is ‘full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,’ unless it is an apprenticeship training. What are we here for? To make character. That is the aim and end of all—to make character; to get experience; to learn the use of our tools. I declare it seems to me that the world had better be wiped out altogether, incontinently, unless there is a world beyond, where a man shall use the force which here he made his own. ‘Thou hast been faithful in a few things; behold I will

make thee ruler over many things.' No man gets to the heart of the mystery of life or has in his hand the key which will enable him to unlock all the doors and difficulties of human experience, unless he gets to this—that it is all meant as training.

If we could only carry that clear conviction with us day by day into the little things of life, what different things these, which we call the monotonous trifles of our daily duties, would become! The things may be small and unimportant, but the way in which we do them is not unimportant. The same fidelity may be exercised, and must be brought to bear, in order to do the veriest trifle of our daily lives rightly, as needs to be invoked, in order to get us safely through the crises and great times of life. There are no great principles for great duties, and little ones for little duties. We have to regulate all our conduct by the same laws. Life is built up of trifles, as mica-flakes, if there be enough of them, make the Alpine summits towering thousands of feet into the blue. Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones. So, life is meant for discipline, and unless we use it for that, however much enjoyment we get out of it, we misuse it.

III. Lastly, there is here a calming thought as to the variety of God's methods with us.

'As the eagle stirreth up his nest.' No doubt the callow brood are much warmer and more comfortable in the nest than when they are turned out of it. The Israelites were by no means enamoured with the prospect of leaving the flesh-pots and the onions and the farmhouses that they had got for themselves in Goshen, to tramp with their cattle through the wilderness. They went after Moses with considerable disinclination.

Here we have, then, as the first thing needed, God's loving compulsion to effort. To 'stir up the nest' means to make a man uncomfortable where he is;—sometimes by the prickings of his conscience, which are often the voices of God's Spirit; sometimes by changes of circumstances, either for the better or for the worse; and oftentimes by sorrows. The straw is pulled out of the nest, and it is not so comfortable to lie in; or a bit of it develops a sharp point that runs into the half-feathered skin, and makes the fledgling glad to come forth into the air. We all shrink from change. What should we do if we had it not? We should stiffen into habits that would dwarf and weaken us. We all recoil from storms. What should we do if we had them not? Sea and air would stagnate, and become heavy and putrid and pestilential, if it were not for the wild west wind and the hurtling storms. So all our changes, instead of being whimpered over, and all our sorrows, instead of being taken reluctantly, should be recognised as being what they are, loving summonses to effort. Then their pressure would be modified, and their blessing would be secured when their purpose was served.

But the training of the father-eagle is not confined to stirring up the nest. What is to become of the young ones when they get out of it, and have never been accustomed to bear themselves up in the invisible ether about them? So 'he fluttereth over his young.' It is a very beautiful word that is employed here, which 'flutter' scarcely gives us. It is the same word that is used in the first chapter of Genesis, about the Spirit of God '*brooding* on the face of the waters'; and it suggests how near, how all-protecting with expanded wings, the divine Father comes to the child whose restfulness He has disturbed.

And is not that true? Had you ever trouble that you took as from Him, which did not bring that hovering presence nearer you, until you could almost feel the motion of the wing, and be brushed by it as it passed protectingly above your head? Ah, yes! 'Stirring the nest' is meant to be the precursor of closer approach of the Father to us; and if we take our changes and our sorrows as loving summonses from Him to effort, be sure that we shall realise Him as near to us, in a fashion that we never did before.

That is not all. There is sustaining power. 'He spreadeth abroad his wings; he taketh them; beareth them on his wings.' On those broad pinions we are lifted, and by them we are guarded. It matters little whether the belief that the parent bird thus carries the young, when wearied with their short flights, is correct or not. The truth which underlies the representation is what concerns us. The beautiful metaphor is a picturesque way of saying, 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted; and the Angel of His presence saved them.' It is a picturesque way of saying, 'Thou canst do all things through Christ which strengtheneth thee.' And we may be very sure that if we let Him 'stir up our nests' and obey His loving summons to effort, He will come very near to strengthen us for our attempts, and to bear us up when our own weak wings fail. The Psalmist sang that angels' hands should bear up God's servant. That is little compared with this promise of being carried heavenwards on Jehovah's own pinions. A vile piece of Greek mythology tells how Jove once, in the guise of an eagle, bore away a boy between his great wings. It is foul where it stands, but it is blessedly true about Christian experience. If only we lay ourselves on God's wings—and that not in idleness, but having

ourselves tried our poor little flight—He will see that no harm comes to us.

During life this training will go on; and after life, what then? Then, in the deepest sense, the old word will be true, 'Ye know how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to *Myself*'; and the great promise shall be fulfilled, when the half-fledged young brood are matured and full grown, 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.'

THEIR ROCK AND OUR ROCK

'Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.'

DEUT. xxxii. 31.

MOSES is about to leave the people whom he had led so long, and his last words are words of solemn warning. He exhorts them to cleave to God. The words of the text simply mean that the history of the nation had sufficiently proved that God, their God, was 'above all gods.' The Canaanites and all the enemies whom Israel had fought had been beaten, and in their awe of this warrior people acknowledged that their idols had found their lord. The great suit of 'Jehovah *versus* Idols' has long since been decided. Every one acknowledges that Christianity is the only religion possible for twentieth century men. But the words of the text lend themselves to a wider application, and clothe in a picturesque garb the universal truth that the experience of godless men proves the futility of their objects of trust, when compared with that of him whose refuge is in God.

I. God is a Rock to them that trust Him.

We note the singular frequency of that designation in this song, in which it occurs six times. It is also

found often in the Psalms. If Moses were the singer, we might see in this often-repeated metaphor a trace of influence of the scenery of the Sinaitic peninsula, which would be doubly striking to eyes accustomed to the alluvial plains of Egypt. What are the aspects of the divine nature set forth by this name?

(1) Firm foundation: the solid eternity of the rock on which we can build.

Petra: faithfulness to promises, unchanging.

(2) Refuge: 'refuge from the storm'; 'my rock and my fortress and my high tower.'

(3) Refreshment: rock from which water gushed out; and (4) Repose: 'shadow of a great rock'; 'shadow from the heat.'

Trace the image through Scripture, from this song till Christ's parable of the man who 'built his house on a rock.'

II. Every man's experience shows him that there is no such refuge anywhere else.

We do not assert that every man consciously comes to that conclusion. All we say is that he would do so if he rightly pondered the facts. The history of every life is a history of disappointment. Take these particulars just stated and ask yourselves: What does experience say as to the possibility of our possessing such blessings apart from God? There is no need for us to exaggerate, for the naked reality is sad enough. If God is not our best Good, we have no solid good. Every other 'rock' crumbles into sand. Else why this restless change, why this disquiet, why the constant repetition, generation after generation, of the old, old wail, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'? Why does every heart say Amen to the poet and the dramatist singing of 'the fever and the fret,' the tragic farce of man's life?

Our appeal is not to men in the flush of excitement, but to them in their hours of solitary sane reflection. It is from 'Philip drunk to Philip sober.' We each have material for judging in our own case, and in the cases of some others. The experiment of living with other 'rocks' than God has been tried for millenniums now. What has been the issue? You know what Christianity claims that it can do to make a life stable and safe. Do you know anything else that can? You know what Christian men will calmly say that they have found. Can you say as much? Let us hear some dying testimonies. Hearken to Jacob: 'The God which hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' Hearken to Moses: 'The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.' Hearken to Joshua: 'Not one good thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake.' Hearken to David: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' Hearken to Paul: 'The Lord stood by me and strengthened me, and I was delivered . . . the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom.' What man who has chosen to take refuge or build on men and creatures can look backward and forward in such fashion?

III. Every man's own nature tells him that God is his true Rock.

Again I say that here I do not appeal to the surface of our consciousness, nor to men who have sophisticated themselves, nor to people who have sinned themselves, into hardness, but to the voice of the

inner man which speaks in the depths of each man's being.

There is the cry of Want: the manifest want of the soul for God.

There is the voice of Reason.

There is the voice of Conscience.

IV. Yet many of us will not take God for our Rock.

Surely it is a most extraordinary thing that men should be 'judges,' being convinced in their deepest consciousness that God is the only Foundation and Refuge, and yet that the conviction should have absolutely no influence on their conduct. The same stark, staring inconsequence is visible in many other departments of life, but in this region it works its most tragic results. The message which many of my hearers need most is—follow out your deepest convictions, and be true to the inward voice which condenses all your experience into the one counsel to take God for the 'strength of your hearts and your portion for ever,' for only in Him will you find what you need for life and strength and riches. If He is 'our Rock,' then we shall have a firm foundation, a safe refuge, inexhaustible refreshment and untroubled rest. Lives founded on aught beside are built on sand and will be full of tremors and unsettlements, and at last the despairing builder and his ruined house will be washed away with the dissolving 'sandbank and shoal of time' on which he built.

GOD AND HIS SAINTS

'He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.'—DEUT. xxxiii. 3.

THE great ode of which these words are a part is called 'the blessing wherewith Moses blessed the children of

Israel before his death.' It is mainly an invocation of blessing from Heaven on the various tribes, but it begins, as the national existence of Israel began, with the revelation of God on Sinai, and it lays that as the foundation of everything. It does not matter, for my purposes, in the smallest degree, who was the author of this great song. Whoever he was, he has, by dint of divine inspiration and of his own sympathy with the inmost spirit of the Old Covenant, anticipated the deepest things of Christian truth; and these are here in the words of our text.

I. The first thing that I would point out is the Divine Love which is the foundation of all.

'He loved the people.' That is the beginning of everything. The word that this singer uses is one that only appears in this place, and if we regard its etymology, there lies in it a very tender and beautiful expression of the warmth of the divine love, for it is probably connected with words in an allied language which mean the *bosom* and a *tender embrace*, and so the picture that we have is of that great divine Lover folding 'the people' to His heart, as a mother might her child, and cherishing them in His bosom.

Still further, the word is in a form in the Hebrew which implies that the act spoken about is neither past, present, nor future only, but continuous and perpetual. Thus it suggests to us the thought of timeless, eternal love, which has no beginning, and therefore has no end, which does not grow, and therefore will never decline nor decay, but which runs on upon one lofty level, with neither ups nor downs, and with no variation of the impulse which sends it forth; always the same, and always holding its objects in the fervent embrace of which the text speaks.

Further, mark the place in this great song where this thought comes in. As I said, it is laid as the beginning of everything. 'We love Him because He first loved us' was the height to which the last of the Apostles attained in the last of his writings. But this old singer, with the mists of antiquity around him, who knew nothing about the Cross, nothing about the historical Christ, who had only that which modern thinkers tell us is a revelation of a wrathful God, somehow or other rose to the height of the evangelical conception of God's love as the foundation of the very existence of a people who are His. Like an orchid growing on a block of dry wood and putting forth a gorgeous bloom, this singer, with so much less to feed his faith than we have, has yet borne this fair flower of deep and devout insight into the secret of things and the heart of God. 'He loved the people'—therefore He formed them for Himself; therefore He brought them out of bondage; therefore He came down in flashing fire on Sinai and made known His will, which to know and do is life. All begins from the tender, timeless love of God.

And if the question is asked, Why does God thus love? the only answer is, Because he is God. 'Not for your sakes, O house of Israel . . . but for Mine own name's sake.' The love of God is self-originated. In it, as in all His acts, He is His own motive, as His name, 'I am that I am,' proclaims. It is inseparable from His being, and flows forth before, and independent of, anything in the creature which could draw it out. Men's love is attracted by their perception or their imagination of something loveable in its objects. It is like a well, where there has to be much work of the pump-handle before the gush comes. God's love is like

an artesian well, or a fountain springing up from unknown depths in obedience to its own impulse. All that we can say is, 'Thou art God. It is Thy nature and property to be merciful.'

'God loved the people.' The bed-rock is the spontaneous, unalterable, inexhaustible, ever-active, fervent love of God, like that with which a mother clasps her child to her maternal breast. The fair flower of this great thought was a product of Judaism. Let no man say that the God of Love is unknown to the Old Testament.

II. Notice how, with this for a basis, we have next the guardian care extended to all those that answer love by love.

The singer goes on to say, mixing up his pronouns, in the fashion of Hebrew poetry, somewhat arbitrarily, 'all *His* saints are in *Thy* hand.' Now, what is a 'saint'? A man who answers God's love by his love. The notion of a saint has been marred and mutilated by the Church and the world. It has been taken as a special designation of certain selected individuals, mostly of the ascetic and monastic type, whereas it belongs to every one of God's people. It has been taken by the world to mean sanctimoniousness and not sanctity, and is a term of contempt rather than of admiration on their lips. And even those of us, who have got beyond thinking that it is a title of honour belonging only to the aristocracy of Christ's Kingdom, are too apt to mistake what it really does mean. It may be useful to say a word about the Scriptural use and true meaning of that much-abused term. The root idea of sanctity or holiness is not moral character, goodness of disposition and of action, but it is separation from the world and consecration to God. As surely as a magnet

applied to a heap of miscellaneous filings will pick out every little bit of iron there, so surely will that love which He bears to the people, when it is responded to, draw to itself, and therefore draw out of the heap, the men that feel its impulse and its preciousness. And so 'saint' means, secondly, righteous and pure, but it means, first, knit to God, separated from evil, and separated by the power of His received love.

Now, brethren, here is a question for each of us: Do I yield to that timeless, tender clasp of the divine Father and Mother in one? Do I answer it by my love? If I do, then I am a 'saint,' because I belong to Him, and He belongs to me, and in that commerce I have broken with the world. If we are true to ourselves, and true to our Lord, and true to the relation between us, the purity of character, which is popularly supposed to be the meaning of *holiness*, will come. Not without effort, not without set-backs, not without slow advance, but it will come; for he that is consecrated to the Lord is 'separated' from iniquity. Such is the meaning of 'saint.'

'All His saints are in Thy hand.' The first metaphor of our text spoke of God's bosom, to which He drew the people and folded them there. This one speaks of His 'hand.' They lie in it. That means two things. It means absolute security, for will He not close His fingers over His palm to keep the soul that has laid itself there? And 'none shall pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No one but yourself can do that. And you can do it, if you cease to respond to His love, and so cease to be a saint. Then you will fall out of His hand, and how far you will fall God only knows.

Being in God's hand means also submission. Loyola said to his black army, 'Be like a stick in a man's hand.'

That meant utter submission and abnegation of self, the willingness to be put anywhere, and used anyhow, and done anything with. And if I by my reception of, and response to, that timeless love, am a saint belonging to God, then not only shall I be secure, but I must be submissive. 'All His saints are in Thy hand.' Do not try to get out of it; be content to let it guide you as the steersman's hand turns the spokes of the wheel and directs the ship.

Now, there is a last thought here. I have spoken of the foundation of all as being divine love, of the security and guardian care of the saints, and there follows one thought more:—

III. The docile obedience of those that are thus guarded.

As the words stand in our Bible, they are as follow:— 'They sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.' These two clauses make up one picture, and one easily understands what it is. It represents a group of docile scholars, sitting at the Master's feet. He is teaching them, and they listen open-mouthed and open-eared to what he says, and will take his words into their lives, like Mary sitting at Christ's feet, whilst Martha was bustling about His meal. But, beautiful as that picture is, there has been suggested a little variation in the words which gives another one that strikes me as being even more beautiful. There are some difficulties of language with which I need not trouble you. But the general result is this, that perhaps instead of 'sitting down at Thy feet' we should read 'followed at Thy feet.' That suggests the familiar metaphor of a guide and those led by him who, without him, know not their road. As a dog follows his master, as the sheep their shepherd, so, this singer felt, will

saints follow the God whom they love. Religion is imitation of God. That was a deep thought for such a stage of revelation, and it in part anticipates Christ's tender words: 'He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.' They follow at His feet. That is the blessedness and the power of Christian morality, that it is keeping close at Christ's heels, and that instead of its being said to us, 'Go,' He says, 'Come,' and instead of our being bid to hew out for ourselves a path of duty, He says to us, 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' They follow at His feet, as the dog at his master's, as the sheep at their shepherd's.

They 'receive His words.' Yes, if you will keep close to Him, He will turn round and speak to you. If you are near enough to Him to catch His whisper He will not leave you without guidance. That is one side of the thought, that following we receive what He says, whereas the people that are away far behind Him scarcely know what His will is, and never can catch the low whisper which will come to us by providences, by movements in our own spirits, through the exercise of our own faculties of judgment and common-sense, if only we will keep near to Him. 'Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouths must be held in with bit and with bridle, else they will not come near to thee,' but walk close behind Him, and then the promise will be fulfilled: 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' A glance tells two people who are in sympathy what each wishes, and Jesus Christ will speak to us, if we keep close at His heels.

They that follow Him will 'receive His words' in another sense. They will take them in, and His words

will not be wasted. And they will receive them in yet another sense. They will carry them out and do them, and His words will not be in vain.

So, dear brethren, the peace, the strength, the blessedness, the goodness, of our lives flow from these three stages, which this singer so long ago had found to be the essence of everything, recognition of the timeless tenderness of God, the yielding to and answering that love, so that it separates us for Himself, the calm security and happy submission which follow thereon, the imitation of Him in daily life, and the walking in His steps, which is rewarded and made more perfect by hearing more distinctly the whisper of His loving, commanding voice.

ISRAEL THE BELOVED

'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders.'—DEUT. xxxiii. 12.

BENJAMIN was his father's favourite child, and the imagery of this promise is throughout drawn from the relations between such a child and its father. So far as the future history of the tribes is shadowed in these 'blessings' of this great ode, the reference of the text may be to the tribe of Benjamin, as specially distinguished by Saul having been a member of it, and by the Temple having been built on its soil. But we find that each of the promises of the text is repeated elsewhere, with distinct reference to the whole nation. For example, the first one, of safe dwelling, reappears in verse 28 in reference to Israel; the second one, of God's protecting covering, is extended to the nation in many places; and the third, of dwelling between His

shoulders, is in substance found again in chap. i. 31, 'the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son.' So that we may give the text a wider extension, and take it as setting forth under a lovely metaphor, and with a restricted reference, what is true of all God's children everywhere and always.

I. Who are the 'beloved of the Lord'?

The first answer to that question must be—all men. But these great blessings, so beautifully shadowed in this text, do not belong to all men; nor does the designation, 'the beloved of the Lord,' belong to all men, but to those who have entered into a special relation to Him. In these words of the Hebrew singer there sound the first faint tones of a music that was to swell into clear notes, when Jesus said: 'If a man love Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.' They who are knit by faith and love to God's only-begotten and beloved Son, by that union receive 'power to become the sons of God,' and share in the love which is ever pouring out from the Father's heart on 'the Son of His love.'

II. What are their blessed privileges?

The three clauses of the text express substantially the same idea, but with a striking variety of metaphors.

1. They have a sure dwelling-place.

There is a very slight change of rendering of the first clause, which greatly increases its force, and preserves the figure that is obscured by the usual translation. We should read 'shall dwell safely *on*,' rather than '*by*, Him.' And the effect of that small change in the preposition is to bring out the thought that God is regarded as the foundation on which His beloved build their house of life, and dwell in security and calm. If we

are sons through the Son, we shall build our houses or pitch our tents on that firm ground, and, being founded on the Rock of ages, they will not fall when all created foundations reel to the overthrow of whatever is built on *them*. It is not companionship only, blessed as that is, that is promised here. We have a larger privilege than dwelling *by* Him, for if we love His Son, we build *on* God, and 'God dwelleth in us and we in Him.'

What spiritual reality underlies the metaphor of dwelling or building on God? The fact of habitual communion.

Note the blessed results of such grounding of our lives on God through such habitual communion. We shall 'dwell safely.' We may think of that as being objective safety—that is, freedom from peril, or as being subjective—that is, freedom from care or fear, or as meaning 'trustfully,' confidently, as the expression is rendered in Psalm xvi. 9 (margin), which is for us the ground of both these. He who dwells in God trustfully dwells both safely and securely, and none else is free either from danger or from dread.

2. They have a sure shelter.

God is for His beloved not only the foundation on which they dwell in safety, but their perpetual covering. They dwell safely because He is so. There are many tender shapes in which this great promise is presented to our faith. Sometimes God is thought of as covering the weak fugitive, as the arching sides of His cave sheltered David from Saul. Sometimes He is represented as covering His beloved, who cower under His wings, 'as the hen gathereth her chickens' when hawks are in the sky. Sometimes He appears as covering them from tempest, 'when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,' and 'the shadow of a

great rock' shields from its fury. Sometimes He is pictured as stretching out protection over His beloved's heads, as the Pillar of cloud lay, long-drawn-out, over the Tabernacle when at rest, and 'on all the Glory was a defence.' But under whatever emblem the general idea of a covering shelter was conceived, there was always a correlative duty on our side. For the root-meaning of one of the Old Testament words for 'faith' is 'fleeing to a refuge,' and we shall not be safe in God unless by faith we flee for refuge to Him in Christ.

3. They have a Father who bears them on His shoulders.

The image is the same as in chap. i. already referred to. It recurs also in Isaiah (xlvi. 3, 4), 'Even to hoar hairs will I carry you, and I have made and I will bear, yea, I will carry, and will deliver'; and in Hosea (xi. 3), 'I taught Ephraim to go; I took them on My arms.'

The image beautifully suggests the thought of the favourite child riding high and happy on the strong shoulder, which lifts it above rough places and miry ways. The prose reality is: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

The Cross carries those who carry it. They who carry God in their hearts are carried by God through all the long pilgrimage of life. Because they are thus upheld by a strength not their own, 'they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint,' and though marches be long and limbs strained, they shall 'go from strength to strength till every one of them appears before God in Zion.'

‘AT THE BUSH’

‘. . . The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.’—DEUT. xxxiii. 16.

I THINK this is the only reference in the Old Testament to that great vision which underlay Moses’ call and Israel’s deliverance. It occurs in what is called ‘the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death,’ although modern opinion tends to decide that this hymn is indeed much more recent than the days of Moses. There seems a peculiar appropriateness in this reference being put into the mouth of the ancient Lawgiver, for to him even Sinai, with all its glories, cannot have been so impressive and so formative of his character as was the vision granted to him when solitary in the wilderness. It is to be noticed that the characteristic by which God is designated here never occurs elsewhere than in this one place. It is intended to intensify the conception of the greatness, and preciousness, and all-sufficiency of that ‘goodwill.’ If it is that ‘of Him that dwelt in the bush,’ it is sure to be all that a man can need. I need not remind you that the words occur in the blessing pronounced on ‘Joseph’—that is, the two tribes which represented Joseph—in which all the greatest material gifts that could be desired by a pastoral people are first called down upon them, and then the ground of all these is laid in ‘the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.’ ‘The blessing—let it come on the head of Joseph.’

So then here, first, is a great thought as to what for us all is the blessing of blessings—God’s ‘goodwill.’ ‘Goodwill’—the word, perhaps, might bear a little stronger rendering. ‘Goodwill’ is somewhat tepid. A

man may have a good enough will, and yet no very strong emotion of favour or delight, and may do nothing to carry his goodwill into action. But the word that is employed here, and is a common enough one in Scripture, always carries with it a certain intensity and warmth of feeling. It is more than 'goodwill'; it is more than 'favour'; perhaps 'delight' would be nearer the meaning. It implies, too, not only the inward sentiment of complacency, but also the active purpose of action in conformity with it, on God's part. Now it needs few words to show that these two things, which are inseparable, do make the blessing of blessings for every one of us—the delight, the complacency, of God in us, and the active purpose of good in God for us. These are the things that will make a man happy wherever he is.

If I might dwell for a moment upon other scriptural passages, I would just recall to you, as bringing up very strongly and beautifully the all-sufficiency and the blessed effects of having this delight and loving purpose directed towards us like a sunbeam, the various great things that a chorus of psalmists say that it will do for a man. Here is one of their triumphant utterances: 'Thou wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield.' That crystal battlement, if I may so vary the figure, is round a man, keeping far away from him all manner of real evil, and filling his quiet heart as he stands erect behind the rampart, with the sense of absolute security. That is one of the blessings that God's favour or goodwill will secure for us. Again, we read: 'By Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.' He that knows himself to be the object of the divine delight, and who by faith knows himself to be the object of the divine activity in

protection, stands firm, and his purposes will be carried through, because they will be purposes in accordance with the divine mind, and nothing has power to shake him. So he that grasps the hand of God can say, not because of his grasp, but because of the Hand that he holds, 'The Lord is at my right hand; I shall not be greatly moved. By Thy favour Thou hast made our mountain to stand strong.' And again, in another analogous but yet diversified representation, we read: 'In Thee shall we rejoice all the day, and in Thy favour shall our horn be exalted.' That is the emblem, not only of victory, but of joyful confidence, and so he who knows himself to have God for his friend and his helper, can go through the world keeping a sunny face, whatever the clouds may be, erect and secure, light of heart and buoyant, holding up his chin above the stormiest waters, and breasting all difficulties and dangers with a confidence far away from presumption, because it is the consequence of the realisation of God's presence. So the goodwill of God is the chiefest good.

Now, if we turn to the remarkable designation of the divine nature which is here, consider what rivers of strength and of blessedness flow out of the thought that for each of us 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may be our possession.

What does that pregnant designation of God say? That was a strange shrine for God, that poor, ragged, dry desert bush, with apparently no sap in its gray stem, prickly with thorns, with 'no beauty that we should desire it,' fragile and insignificant, yet it was 'God's house.' Not in the cedars of Lebanon, not in the great monarchs of the forest, but in the forlorn child of the desert did He abide. 'The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may dwell in you and me. Never

mind how small, never mind how sapless, never mind how lightly esteemed among men, never mind though we make a very poor show by the side of the 'oaks of Bashan' or the 'cedars of Lebanon.' It is all right; the Fire does not dwell in them. 'Unto this man will I look, and with him will I dwell, who is of a humble and a contrite heart, and who trembleth at My word.' Let no sense of poverty, weakness, unworthiness, ever draw the faintest film of fear across our confidence, for even with us He will sojourn. For it is 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' that we evoke for ours.

Again, what more does that name say? He 'that dwelt in the bush' filled it with fire, and it 'burned and was not consumed.' Now there is good ground to object to the ordinary interpretation, as if the burning of the bush which yet remains unconsumed was meant to symbolise Israel, or, in the New Testament application, the Church which, notwithstanding all persecution, still remains undestroyed. Our brethren of the Presbyterian churches have taken the Latin form of the words in the context for their motto—*Nec Tamen Consumebatur*. But I venture to think that that is a mistake; and that what is meant by the symbol is just what is expressed by the verbal revelation which accompanied it, and that was this: 'I AM THAT I AM.' The fire that did not burn out is the emblem of the divine nature which does not tend to death because it lives, nor to exhaustion because it energises, nor to emptiness because it bestows, but after all times is the same; lives by its own energy and is independent. 'I am that I have become,'—that is what men have to say. 'I am that I once was not, and again once shall not be,' is what men have to say. 'I am that I am' is God's name. And this eternal, ever-living, self-sufficing, absolute,

independent, unwearied, inexhaustible God is the God whose favour is as inexhaustible as Himself, and eternal as His own being. 'Therefore the sons of men shall put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings,' and, if they have 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush,' will be able to say, 'Because Thou livest we shall live also.'

What more does the name say? He 'that dwelt in the bush' dwelt there in order to deliver; and, dwelling there, declared 'I have seen the affliction of My people, and am come down to deliver them.' So, then, if the goodwill of that eternal, delivering God is with us, we, too, may feel that our trivial troubles and our heavy burdens, all the needs of our prisoned wills and captive souls, are known to Him, and that we shall have deliverance from them by Him. Brethren, in that name, with its historical associations, with its deep revelations of the divine nature, with its large promises of the divine sympathy and help, there lie surely abundant strengths and consolations for us all. The goodwill, the delight, of God, and the active help of God, may be ours, and if these be ours we shall be blessed and strong.

Do not let us forget the place in this blessing on the head of Joseph which my text holds. It is preceded by an invoking of the precious things of Heaven, and 'the precious fruits brought forth by the sun . . . of the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills, and the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof.' They are all heaped together in one great mass for the beloved Joseph. And then, like the golden spire that tops some of those campaniles in Italian cities, and completes their beauty, above them all there is set, as the shining

apex of all, 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.' That is more precious than all other precious things; set last because it is to be sought first; set last as in building some great structure the top stone is put on last of all; set last because it gathers all others into itself, secures that all others shall be ours in the measure in which we need them, and arms us against all possibilities of evil. So the blessing of blessings is the 'goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.'

In my text this is an invocation only; but we can go further than that. You and I can make sure that we have it, if we will. How to secure it? One of the texts which I have already quoted helps us a little way along the road in answer to that question, for it says, 'Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous. With favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.' But it is of little use to tell me that if I am 'righteous' God will 'bless me,' and 'compass me with favour.' If you will tell me how to become righteous, you will do me more good. And we have been told how to be righteous—'If a man keep My commandments My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.' If we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ, and we can all do that if we like, by faith that trusts Him, and by love, the child of faith, that obeys Him, and grows daily more like Him—then, without a doubt, that delight of God in us, and that active purpose of good in God's mind towards us, will assuredly be ours; and on no other terms.

So, dear brethren, the upshot of my homily is just this—Men may strive and scheme, and wear their finger-nails down to the quick, to get some lesser good, and fail after all. The greatest good is certainly ours by that easy road which, however hard it may be otherwise, is made

easy because it is so certain to bring us to what we want. Holiness is the condition of God's delight in us, and a genuine faith in Christ, and the love which faith evokes, are the conditions. So it is a very simple matter. You never can be sure of getting the lower good. You can be quite sure of getting the highest. You never can be certain that the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof will be yours, or that if they were, they would be so very precious; but you can be quite sure that the 'goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may lie like light upon your hearts, and be strength to your limbs.

And so I commend to you the words of the Apostle, 'Wherefore we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.' To minister to God's delight is the highest glory of man. To have the favour of Him that dwelt in the bush resting upon us is the highest blessing for man. He will say 'Well done! good and faithful servant.' 'The Lord taketh pleasure'—wonderful as it sounds—'in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy,' and that, hoping in His mercy, live as He would have them live.

SHOD FOR THE ROAD

'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.'
DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

THERE is a general correspondence between those blessings wherewith Moses blessed the tribes of Israel before his death, and the circumstances and territory of each tribe in the promised land. The portion of Asher, in whose blessing the words of our text occurs, was partly the rocky northern coast and partly the

fertile lands stretching to the base of the Lebanon. In the inland part of their territory they cultivated large olive groves, the produce of which was trodden out in great rock-hewn cisterns. So the clause before my text is a benediction upon that industry—'let him dip his foot in oil.' And then the metaphor naturally suggested by the mention of the foot is carried on into the next words, 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' the tribe being located upon rocky sea-coast, having rough roads to travel, and so needing to be well shod. The substance, then, of that promise seems to be—strength adequate to, and unworn by, exercise; while the second clause, though not altogether plain, seems to put a somewhat similar idea in unmetaphorical shape. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be,' probably means the promise of power that grows with growing years.

So, then, we have first that thought that God gives us an equipment of strength proportioned to our work,—shoes fit for our road. God does not turn people out to scramble over rough mountains with thin-soled boots on; that is the plain English of the words. When an Alpine climber is preparing to go away into Switzerland for rock work, the first thing he does is to get a pair of strong shoes, with plenty of iron nails in the soles of them. So Asher had to be shod for his rough roads, and so each of us may be sure that if God sends us on stony paths He will provide us with strong shoes, and will not send us out on any journey for which He does not equip us well.

There are no difficulties to be found in any path of duty, for which he that is called to tread it is not prepared by Him that sent him. Whatsoever may be the road, our equipment is calculated for it, and is given to us from Him that has appointed it.

Is there not a suggestion here, too, as to the sort of travelling we may expect to have? An old saying tells us that we do not go to heaven in silver slippers, and the reason is because the road is rough. The 'primrose way' leads somewhere else, and *it* may be walked on 'delicately.' But if we need shoes of iron and brass, we may pretty well guess the kind of road we have before us. If a man is equipped with such coverings on his feet, depend upon it that there will be use for them before he gets to the end of his day's journey. The thickest sole will make the easiest travelling over rocky roads. So be quite sure of this, that if God gives to us certain endowments and equipments which are only calculated for very toilsome paths, the roughness of the road will match the stoutness of the shoes.

And see what He does give. See the provision which is made for patience and strength, for endurance and courage, in all the messages of His mercy, in all the words of His love, in all the powers of His Gospel, and then say whether that looks as if we should have an easy life of it on our way home. Those two ships that went away a while ago upon the brave, and, as some people thought, desperate task of finding the North Pole—any one that looked upon them as they lay in Portsmouth Roads, might know that it was no holiday cruise they were meant for. The thickness of the sides, the strength of the cordage, the massiveness of the equipment, did not look like pleasure-sailing.

And so, dear brethren, if we think of all that is given to us in God's Gospel in the way of stimulus and encouragement, and exhortation, and actual communication of powers, we may calculate, from the abundance of the resources, how great will be the strain upon us before we come to the end, and our 'feet stand within

thy gates, O Jerusalem.' Go into some of the great fortresses in continental countries, and you will find the store-rooms full of ammunition and provisions; bread enough and biscuits enough, as it seems, for half the country, laid up there, and a deep well somewhere or other in the courtyard. What does that mean? It means fighting, that is what it means. So if we are brought into this strong pavilion, so well provisioned, so massively fortified and defended, that means that we shall need all the strength that is to be found in those thick walls, and all the sustenance that is to be found in those gorged magazines, and all the refreshment that is to be drawn from that free, and full, and inexhaustible fountain, before the battle is over and the victory won. Depend upon it, the promise 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' means, 'Thy road shall be rocky and flinty'; and so it is.

And yet, thank God! whilst it is true that it is very hard and very difficult for many of us, and hard and difficult—even if without the 'very'—for us all, it is also true that we have the adequate provision sufficient for all our necessities—and far more than sufficient! It is a poor compliment to the strength that He gives to us to say that it is enough to carry us through. God does not deal out His gifts to people with such an economical correspondence to necessities as that. There is always a wide margin. More than we can ask, more than we can think, more than we can need is given us.

If He were to deal with us as men often deal with one another, asking us, 'Well, how much do you want? cannot you do with a little less? there is the exact quantity that you need for your support'—if you got your bread by weight and your water by measure, it would be a very poor affair. See how He actually

does—He says, ‘Child, there is Mine own strength for you’; and we think that we honour Him when we say, ‘God has given us enough for our necessities!’ Rather the old word is always true: ‘So they did eat and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained seven baskets-full,’ and after they were satisfied and replete with the provision, there was more at the end than when they began.

That suggests another possible thought to be drawn from this promise, namely, that it assures not only of strength adequate to the difficulties and perils of the journey, but also of a strength which is not worn out by use.

The ‘portion’ of Asher was the rocky sea-coast. The sharp, jagged rocks would cut to pieces anything made of leather long before the day’s march was over; but the travellers have their feet shod with metal, and the rocks which they have to stumble over will only strike fire from their shoes. They need not step timidly for fear of wearing them out; but, wherever they have to march, may go with full confidence that their shoeing will not fail them. A wise general looks after that part of his soldiers’ outfit with special care, knowing that if *it* gives out, all the rest is of no use. So our Captain provides us with an inexhaustible strength, to which we may fully trust. We shall not exhaust it by any demands that we can make upon it. We shall only brighten it up, like the nails in a well-used shoe, the heads of which are polished by stumbling and scrambling over rocky roads.

So we may be bold in the march, and draw upon our stock of strength to the utmost. There is no fear that it will fail us. We may put all our force into our work, we shall not weaken the power which ‘by reason of use

is exercised, not exhausted. For the grace which Christ gives us to serve Him, being divine, is subject to no weariness, and neither faints nor fails. The bush that burned unconsumed is a type of that Infinite Being who works unexhausted, and lives undying, after all expenditure is rich, after all pouring forth is full. And of His strength we partake.

Whensoever a man puts forth an effort of any kind whatever—when I speak, when I lift my hand, when I run, when I think—there is waste of muscular tissue. Some of my strength goes in the act, and thus every effort means expenditure and diminution of force. Hence weariness that needs sleep, waste that needs food, languor that needs rest. We belong to an order of being in which work is death, in regard to our physical nature; but our spirits may lay hold of God, and enter into an order of things in which work is not death, nor effort exhaustion, nor is there loss of power in the expenditure of power.

That sounds strange, and yet it is not strange. Think of that electric light which is made by directing a strong stream upon two small pieces of carbon. As the electricity strikes upon these and turns their blackness into a fiery blaze, it eats away their substance while it changes them into light. But there is an arrangement in the lamp by which a fresh surface is continually being brought into the path of the beam, and so the light continues without wavering and blazes on. The carbon is our human nature, black and dull in itself; the electric beam is the swift energy of God, which makes us 'light in the Lord.' For the one, decay is the end of effort; for the other, there is none. 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' Though we belong to the

perishing order of nature by our bodily frame, we belong to the undecaying realm of grace by the spirit that lays hold upon God. And if our work weary us, as it must do so long as we continue here, yet in the deepest sanctuary of our being, our strength is greatened by exercise. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.' 'Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.' 'Stand, therefore, having your feet shod with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace.'

But this is not all. There is an advance even upon these great promises in the closing words. That second clause of our text says more than the first one. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' that promises us powers and provision adapted to, and unexhausted by, the weary pilgrimage and rough road of life. But 'as thy days, so shall thy strength be,' says even more than that. The meaning of the word rendered 'strength' in our version is very doubtful, and most modern translators are inclined to render it 'rest.' But if we adhere to the translation of our version, we get a forcible and relevant promise, which fits on well to the previous clause, understood as it has been in my previous remarks. The usual understanding of the words is 'strength proportioned to thy day,' an idea which we have found already suggested by the previous clause. But that explanation rests on, or at any rate derives support from, the common misquotation of the words. They are not, as we generally hear them quoted, 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be,'—but 'day' is in the plural, and that makes a great difference. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be,' that is to say: the two sums—of 'thy days' and of 'thy strength'—keep growing side by side, the one as fast as the other and

no faster. The days increase. Well, what then? The strength increases too. As I said, we are allied to two worlds. According to the law of one of them, the outer world of physical life, we soon reach the summit of human strength. For a little while it is true, even in the life of nature, that our power grows with our days. But we soon reach the watershed, and then the opposite comes to be true. Down, steadily down, we go. With diminishing power, with diminishing vitality, with a dimmer eye, with an obtuser ear, with a slower-beating heart, with a feebler frame, we march on and on to our grave. 'As thy days, so shall thy weakness be,' is the law for all of us mature men and women in regard to our outward life.

But, dear brethren, we may be emancipated from that dreary law in regard to the true life of our spirits, and instead of growing weaker as we grow older, we may and we should grow stronger. We may be and we should be moving on a course that has no limit to its advance. We may be travelling on a shining path through the heavens, that has no noon-tide height from which it must slowly and sadly decline, but tends steadily and for ever upwards, nearer and nearer to the very fountain itself of heavenly radiance. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more till the noon-tide of the day.' But the reality surpasses even that grand thought, for it discloses to us an endless approximation to an infinite beauty, and an ever-growing possession of never exhausted fulness, as the law for the progress of all Christ's servants. The life of each of us may and should be continual accession and increase of power through all the days here, through all the ages beyond. Why? Because 'the life which I live, I live by the faith

of the Son of God.' Christ liveth in me. It is not my strength that grows, so much as God's strength in me which is given more abundantly as the days roll. It is so given on one condition. If my faith has laid hold of the infinite, the exhaustless, the immortal energy of God, unless there is something fearfully wrong about me, I shall be becoming purer, nobler, wiser, more observant of His will, gentler, liker Christ, every way fitter for His service, and for larger service, as the days increase.

Those of us who have reached middle life, or perhaps gone a little over the watershed, ought to have this experience as our own in a very distinct degree. The years that are past ought to have drawn us somewhat away from our hot pursuing after earthly and perishable things. They should have added something to the clearness and completeness of our perception of the deep simplicity of God's gospel. They should have tightened our hold and increased our possession of Christ, and unfolded more and more of His all-sufficiency. They should have enriched us with memories of God's loving care, and lighted all the sky behind with a glow which is reflected on the path before us, and kindles calm confidence in His unfailing goodness. They should have given us power and skill for the conflicts that yet remain, as the Red Indians believe that the strength of every defeated and scalped enemy passes into his conqueror's arm. They should have given force to our better nature, and weakening, progressive weakening, to our worse. They should have rooted us more firmly and abidingly in Him from whom all our power comes, and so have given us more and fuller supplies of His exhaustless and ever-flowing might.

So it may be with us if we abide in Him, without

whom we are nothing, but partaking of whose strength 'the weakest shall be as David, and David as an angel of God.'

If for us, drawing nearer to the end is drawing nearer to the light, our faces will be brightened more and more with that light which we approach, and our path will be 'as the shining light which shines more and more unto the noon-tide of the day,' because we are closer to the very fountain of heavenly radiance, and growingly bathed and flooded with the outgoings of His glory. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.'

The promise ought to be true for us all. It is true for all who use the things that are freely given to them of God. And whilst thus it is the law for the devout life here, its most glorious fulfilment remains for the life beyond. There each new moment shall bring new strength, and growing millenniums but add fresh vigour to our immortal life. Here the unresting beat of the waves of the sea of time gnaws away the bank and shoal whereon we stand, but there each roll of the great ocean of eternity shall but spread new treasures at our feet and add new acres to our immortal heritage. 'The oldest angels,' says Swedenborg, 'look the youngest.' When life is immortal, the longer it lasts the stronger it becomes, and so the spirits that have stood for countless days before His throne, when they appear to human eyes, appear as — 'young men clothed in long white garments,'—full of unaging youth and energy that cannot wane. So, whilst in the flesh we must obey the law of decay, the spirit may be subject to this better law of life, and 'while the outward man perisheth, the inward man be renewed day by day.' 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly

fall; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.'

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

'So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. 6. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.'—DEUT. xxxiv. 5, 6.

A FITTING end to such a life! The great law-giver and leader had been all his days a lonely man; and now, surrounded by a new generation, and all the old familiar faces vanished, he is more solitary than ever. He had lived alone with God, and it was fitting that alone with God he should die.

How the silent congregation must have watched, as, alone, with 'natural strength unabated,' he breasted the mountain, and went up to be seen no more! With dignified reticence our chapter tells us no details. He 'died there,' in that dreary solitude, and in some cleft he was buried, and no man knows where. The lessons of that solitary death and unknown tomb may best be learned by contrast with another death and another grave—those of the Leader of the New Covenant, the Law-giver and Deliverer from a worse bondage, and Guide into a better Canaan, the Son who was faithful over His own house, as Moses was 'faithful in all his house, as a servant.' That lonely and forgotten grave among the savage cliffs was in keeping with the whole character and work of him who lay there.

'Here,—here 's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects;
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.'

Contrast that grave with the sepulchre in the garden where Jesus lay, close by a city wall, guarded by foes, haunted by troops of weeping friends, visited by a great light of angel faces. The one was hidden and solitary, as teaching the loneliness and mystery of death; the other revealed light in the darkness, and companionship in the loneliness. The one faded from men's memory because it was nothing to any man; no impulses, nor hopes, nor gifts, could come from it. The other forever draws hearts and memories, because in it was wrought out the victory in which all our hopes are rooted. An endured cross, an empty grave, an occupied throne, are as the threefold cord on which all our hopes hang. Moses was solitary as God's servant in life and death, and oblivion covered his mountain grave. Christ's 'delights were with the sons of men.' He lived among them, and all men 'know his sepulchre to this day.'

I. Note, then, first, as a lesson gathered from this lonely death, the penalty of transgression.

One of the great truths which the old law and ordinances given by Moses were intended to burn in on the conscience of the Jew, and through him on the conscience of the world, was that indissoluble connection between evil done and evil suffered, which reaches its highest exemplification in the death which is the 'wages of sin.' And just as some men that have invented instruments for capital punishment have themselves had to prove the sharpness of their own axe, so the law-giver, whose message it had been to declare, 'the soul that sinneth it shall die,' had himself to go up alone to the mountain-top to receive in his own person the exemplification of the law that had been spoken by his own lips. He sinned when, in a moment of passion

(with many palliations and excuses), he smote the rock that he was bidden to address, and forgot therein, and in his angry words to the rebels, that he was only an instrument in the divine hand. It was a momentary wavering in a hundred and twenty years of obedience. It was one failure in a life of self-abnegation and suppression. The stern sentence came.

People say, 'A heavy penalty for a small offence.' Yes; but an offence of Moses could not be a small offence.' *Noblesse oblige!* The higher a man rises in communion with God, and the more glorious the message and office which are put into his hands, the more intolerable in him is the slightest deflection from the loftiest level. A splash of mud, that would never be seen on a navy's clothes, stains the white satin of a bride or the embroidered garment of a noble. And so a little sin done by a loftily endowed and inspired man ceases to be small.

Nor are we to regard that momentary lapse only from the outside and the surface. One little mark under the armpit of a plague-sufferer tells the physician that the fatal disease is there. A tiny leaf above ground may tell that, deep below, lurks the root of a poison plant. That little deflection, coming as it did at the beginning of the resumption of his functions by the Lawgiver after seven-and-thirty years of comparative abeyance, and on his first encounter with the new generation that he had to lead, was a very significant indication that his character had begun to yield and suffer from the strain that had been put upon it; and that, in fact, he was scarcely fit for the responsibilities that the new circumstances brought. So the penalty was not so disproportionate to the fault as it may seem.

And was the penalty such a very great one? Do you

think that a man who had been toiling for eighty years at a very thankless task would consider it a very severe punishment to be told, 'Go home and take your wages'? It did not mean the withdrawal of the divine favour. 'Moses and Aaron among his priests. . . Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' The penalty of a forgiven sin is never hard to bear, and the penalty of a forgiven sin is very often punctually and mercifully exacted.

But still we are not to ignore the fact that this lonely death, with which we are now concerned, is of the nature of a penal infliction. And so it stands forth in consonance with the whole tone of the Mosaic teaching. I admit, of course, that the mere physical fact of the separation between body and spirit is simply the result of natural law. But that is not the death that you and I know. Death as we know it, the ugly thing that flings its long shadows across all life, and that comes armed with terrors for conscience and spirit, is 'the wages of sin,' and is only experienced by men who have transgressed the law of God. So far Moses in his life and in his death carries us—that no transgression escapes the appropriate punishment; that the smallest sin has in it the seeds of mortal consequences; that the loftiest saint does not escape the law of retribution.

And no further does Moses with his Law and his death carry us. But we turn to the other death. And there we find the confirmation, in an eminent degree, of that Law, and yet the repeal of it. It is confirmed and exhausted in Jesus Christ. His death was 'the wages of sin.' Whose? Not His. Mine, yours, every man's. And because He died, surrounded by men, outside the old city wall, pure and sinless in Himself, He

therein both said 'Amen' to the Law of Moses, and swept it away. For all the sins of the world were laid upon His head, He bore the curse for us all, and has emptied the bitter cup which men's transgressions have mingled. Therefore the solitary death in the desert proclaims 'the wages of sin'; that death outside the city wall proclaims 'the gift of God,' which is 'eternal life.'

II. Another of the lessons of our incident is the withdrawal, by a hard fate, of the worker on the very eve of the completion of his work.

For all these forty years there had gleamed before the fixed and steadfast spirit of the sorely tried leader one hope that he never abandoned, and that was that he might look upon and enter into the blessed land which God had promised. And now he stands on the heights of Moab. Half a dozen miles onwards, as the crow flies, and his feet would tread its soil. He lifts his eyes, and away up yonder, in the far north, he sees the rolling uplands of Gilead, and across the deep gash where the Jordan runs, he catches a glimpse of the blue hills of Naphtali or of Galilee, and the central mountain masses of Ephraim and Manasseh, where Ebal and Gerizim lift their heads; and then, further south, the stony summits of the Judæan hills, where Jerusalem and Bethlehem lie, and, through some gap in the mountains, a gleam as of sunshine upon armour tells where the ocean is. And then his eye falls upon the waterless plateau of the South, and at his feet the fertile valley of Jordan, with Jericho glittering amongst its palm trees like a diamond set in emeralds, and on some spur of the lower hill bounding the plain, the little Zoar. This was the land which the Lord had promised to the fathers, for which he had been yearning, and to which

all his work had been directed all these years; and now he is to die, as my text puts it, with such pathetic emphasis, 'there in Moab,' and to have no part in the fair inheritance.

It is the lot of all epoch-making men, of all great constructive and reforming geniuses, whether in the Church or in the world, that they should toil at a task, the full issues of which will not be known until their heads are laid low in the dust. But if, on the one hand, that seems hard, on the other hand there is the compensation of 'the vision of the future and all the wonder that shall be,' which is granted many a time to the faithful worker ere he closes his eyes. But that is not the fate of epoch-making and great men only; it is the law for our little lives. If these are worth anything, they are constructed on a scale too large to bring out all their results here and now. It is easy for a man to secure immediate consequences of an earthly kind; easy enough for him to make certain that he shall have the fruit of his toil. But quick returns mean small profits; and an unfinished life that succeeds in nothing may be far better than a completed one, that has realised all its shabby purposes and accomplished all its petty desires. Do you, my brother, live for the far-off; and seek not for the immediate issues and fruits that the world can give, but be contented to be of those whose toil waits for eternity to disclose its significance. Better a half-finished temple than a finished pigstye or huckster's shop. Better a life, the beginning of much and the completion of nothing, than a life directed to and hitting an earthly aim. 'He that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting,' and his harvest and garner are beyond the grave.

III. Again, notice here the lesson of the solitude and mystery of death.

Moses dies alone, with no hand to clasp his, none to close his eyes; but God's finger does it. The outward form of his death is but putting into symbol and visibility the awful characteristics of that last moment for us all. However closely we have been twined with others, each of us has to unclasp dear hands, and make that journey through the narrow, dark tunnel by himself. We live alone in a very real sense, but we each have to die as if there were not another human being in the whole universe but only ourselves. But the solitude may be a solitude with God. Up there, alone with the stars and the sky and the everlasting rocks and menacing death, Moses had for companion the supporting God. That awful path is not too desolate and lonely to be trodden if we tread it with Him.

Moses' lonely death leads to a society yonder. If you refer to the thirty-second chapter you will find that, when he was summoned to the mountain, God said to him, 'Die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered to thy people.' He was to be buried there, up amongst the rocks of Moab, and no man was ever to visit his sepulchre to drop a tear over it. How, then, was he 'gathered to his people'? Surely only thus, that, dying in the desert alone, he opened his eyes in 'the City,' surrounded by 'solemn troops and sweet societies' of those to whom he was kindred. So the solitude of a moment leads on to blessed and eternal companionship.

So far the death of Moses carries us. What does the other death say? Moses had none but God with him when he died. There is a drearier desolation than that, and Jesus Christ proved it when He cried, 'My

God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' That was solitude indeed, and in that hour of mysterious, and to us unfathomable, desertion and misery, the lonely Christ sounded a depth, of which the lawgiver in His death but skimmed the surface. Christ was parted from God in His death, because He bore on Him the sins that separate us from our Father, and in order that none of us may ever need to tread that dark passage alone, but may be able to say, 'I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me'—Thou, who hast trodden every step in its rough and dreary path, uncheered by the presence which cheers us and millions more. Christ died that we might live. He died alone that, when we come to die, we may hold His hand and the solitude may vanish.

Then, again, our incident teaches us the mystery that wrapped death to that ancient world, of which we may regard that unknown and forgotten sepulchre as the visible symbol. Deep darkness lies over the Old Testament in reference to what is beyond the grave, broken by gleams of light, when the religious consciousness asserted its indestructibility, in spite of all appearance to the contrary; but never growing to the brightness of serene and continuous assurance of immortal life and resurrection. We may conceive that mysteriousness as set forth for us by that grave that was hidden away in the defiles of Moab, unvisited and uncared for by any.

We turn to the other grave, and there, as the stone is rolled away, and the rising sunshine of the Easter morning pours into it, we have a visible symbol of the life and immortality which Jesus Christ then brought to light by His Gospel. The buried grave speaks of the inscrutable mystery that wrapped the future: the open

sepulchre proclaims the risen Lord of life, and the sunlight certainty of future blessedness which we owe to Him. Death is solitary no more, though it be lonely as far as human companionship is concerned; and a mystery no more, though what is beyond is hidden from our view, and none but Christ has ever returned to tell the tale, and He has told us little but the fact that we shall live with Him.

We rejoice that we have not to turn to a grave hid amongst the hills where our dead Leader lies, but to an open sepulchre by the city wall in the sunshine, from whence has come forth the ever-living 'Captain of our salvation.'

IV. The last lesson is the uselessness of a dead leader to a generation with new conflicts.

Commentators have spent a great deal of ingenuity in trying to assign reasons why God concealed the grave of Moses. The text does not say that God concealed it at all. The ignorance of the place of his sepulchre does not seem to have been part of the divine design, but simply a consequence of the circumstances of his death, and of the fact that he lay in an enemy's land, and that they had had something else to do than go to look for the grave of a dead commander. They had to conquer the land, and a living Joshua was what they wanted, not a dead Moses.

So we may learn from this how easily the gaps fill. 'Thirty days' mourning,' and says my text, with almost a bitter touch, 'so the days of mourning for Moses were ended.' A month of it, that was all; and then everybody turned to the new man that was appointed for the new work. God has many tools in His tool-chest, and He needs them all before the work is done. Joshua could no more have wielded Moses' rod than

Moses could have wielded Joshua's sword. The one did his work, and was laid aside. New circumstances required a new type of character—the smaller man better fitted for the rougher work. And so it always is. Each generation, each period, has its own men that do some little part of the work which has to be done, and then drop it and hand over the task to others. The division of labour is the multiplication of joy at the end, and 'he that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together.'

But whilst the one grave tells us, 'This man served his generation by the will of God, and was laid asleep and saw corruption,' the other grave proclaims One whom all generations need, whose work is comprehensive and complete, who dies never. 'He liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore.' Christ, and Christ alone, can never be antiquated. This day requires Him, and has in Him as complete an answer to all its necessities as if no other generation had ever possessed Him. He liveth for ever, and for ever is the Shepherd of men.

So Aaron dies and is buried on Hor, and Moses dies and is buried on Pisgah, and Joshua steps into his place, and, in turn, he disappears. The one eternal Word of God worked through them all, and came at last Himself in human flesh to be the Everlasting Deliverer, Redeemer, Founder of the Covenant, Law-giver, Guide through the wilderness, Captain of the warfare, and all that the world or a single soul can need until the last generation has crossed the flood, and the wandering pilgrims are gathered in the land of their inheritance. The dead Moses pre-supposes and points to the living Christ. Let us take Him for our all-sufficing and eternal Guide.

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

THE NEW LEADER'S COMMISSION

'Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 2. Moses My servant is dead: now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. 3. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. 4. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. 5. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. 6. Be strong and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swear unto their fathers to give them. 7. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. 9. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. 10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 11. Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.'—JOSHUA i. 1-11.

THE closest connection exists between Deuteronomy and Joshua. The narrative may be read as running on without a break. It turns away from the lonely grave up on the mountain to the bustling camp and the new leader. No man is indispensable. God's work goes on uninterrupted. The instruments are changed, but the Master-hand is the same, and lays one tool aside and takes another out of the tool-chest as He will. Moses is dead,—what then? Does his death paralyse the march of the tribes? No; it is but the ground for the ringing command, '*Therefore arise, go over this Jordan.*' The immediate installation of his successor,

and the uninterrupted continuance of the advance, do not mean that Moses is not honoured or is forgotten, for the narrative lovingly links his honorific title, 'the servant of the Lord,' with the mention of his death; and God Himself does the same, for he is thrice referred to in the divine command to Joshua, as the recipient of the promise of the conquest, as the example of the highest experience of God's all-sufficing companionship, and as the medium by which Israel received the law. Joshua steps into the empty place, receives the same great promise, is assured of the same Presence, and is to obey the same law. The change of leaders is great, but nothing else is changed; and even it is not so great as faint hearts in their sorrow are apt to think, for the real Leader lives, and Moses and Joshua alike are but the transmitters of His orders and His aids to Israel.

The first command given to Joshua was a trial of his faith, for 'Jordan was in flood' (Joshua iii. 15),—and how was that crowd to get across, when fords were impassable and ferry-boats were wanting, to say nothing of the watchful eyes that were upon them from the other bank? To cross a stream in the face of the enemy is a ticklish operation, even for modern armies; what must it have been, then, for Joshua and his horde? Not a hint is given him as to the means by which the crossing is to be made possible. He has Jehovah's command to do it, and Jehovah's promise to be with him, and that is to be enough. We too have sometimes to face undertakings which we cannot see how to carry through; but if we do see that the path is one appointed by God, and will boldly tread it, we may be quite sure that, when we come to what at present seems like a mountain wall across it, we shall find that the glen opens as we advance, and that there is a way,—narrow,

perhaps, and dangerous, but practicable. 'One step enough for me' should be our motto. We may trust God not to command impossibilities, nor to lead us into a *cul de sac*.

The promise to Moses (Deut. ii. 24) is repeated almost verbally in verse 4. The boundaries of the land are summarily given as from 'the wilderness' in the south to 'this Lebanon' in the north, and from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. 'The land of the Hittites' is not found in the original passage in Deuteronomy, and it seems to be a designation of the territory between Lebanon and the Euphrates, which we now know to have been the seat of the northern Hittites, while the southern branch was planted round Hebron and the surrounding district. But these wide boundaries were not attained till late in the history, and were not long retained. Did the promise, then, fail? No, for it, like all the promises, was contingent on conditions, and Israel's unfaithfulness cut short its extent of territory. We, too, fail to possess all the land destined for us. Our charter is much wider than our actual wealth. God gives more than we take, and we are content to occupy but a corner of the broad land which He has given us. In like manner Joshua did not realise to the full the following promise of uniform victory, but was defeated at Ai and elsewhere. The reason was the same,—the faithlessness of the people. Unbelief and sin turn a Samson into a weakling, and make Israel flee before the ranks of the Philistines.

The great encouragement given to Joshua in entering on his hard and perilous enterprise is twice repeated here: 'As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee.' Did Joshua remember how, nearly forty years since,

he had fronted the mob of cowards with the very same assurance, and how the answer had been a shower of stones? The cowards are all dead,—will their sons believe the assurance now? If we do believe that God is with us, we shall be ready to cross Jordan in flood, and to meet the enemies that are waiting on the other bank. If we do not, we shall not dare greatly, nor succeed in what we attempt. The small successes of material wealth and gratified ambition may be ours, but for all the higher duties and nobler conflicts that become a man, the condition of achievement and victory is steadfast faith in God's presence and help.

That assurance—which we may all have if we cling to Jesus, in whom God comes to be with every believing soul—is the only basis on which the command to Joshua, thrice repeated, can wisely or securely be rested. It is mockery to say to a man conscious of weakness, and knowing that there are evils which must surely come, and evils which may possibly come, against which he is powerless, 'Don't be afraid,' unless you can show him good reason why he need not be. And there is only one reason which can still reasonable dread in a human heart that has to front 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' and sees behind them all the grim form of death. He ought to be afraid, unless—unless what? Unless he has heard and taken into his inmost soul the Voice that said to Joshua, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee: be strong and of a good courage,' or, still more sweet and peace-bringing, the Voice that said to the frightened crew of the fishing-boat in the storm and the darkness, 'It is I; be not afraid.' If we know that Christ is with us, it is wise to be strong and

¹ courageous; if we are meeting the tempest alone, the
⁰ best thing we can do is to fear, for the fear may drive

us to seek for His help, and He ever stretches out His hand to him who is afraid, as he ought to be, when he feels the cold water rising above his knees, and by his very fear is driven to faith, and cries, 'Lord, save; I perish!'

Courage that does not rest on Christ's presence is audacity rather than courage, and is sure to collapse, like a pricked bladder, when the sharp point of a real peril comes in contact with it. If we sit down and reckon the forces that we have to oppose to the foes that we are sure to meet, we shall find ourselves unequal to the fight, and, if we are wise, shall 'send the ambassage' of a humble desire to the great King, who will come to our help with His all-conquering powers. Then, and only then, shall we be safe in saying, 'I will not fear what man can do unto me, or devils either,' when we have said, 'In God have I put my trust,' and have heard Him answering, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.'

THE CHARGE TO THE SOLDIER OF THE LORD

'Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded thee . . . that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.'—JOSHUA i. 7, 8.

THIS is the central portion of the charge given to the successor of Moses. Joshua was a very small man in comparison with his predecessor. He was no prophet nor constructive genius; he was not capable of the heights of communion and revelation which the lofty spirit of Moses was able to mount. He was only a plain, fiery soldier, with energy, swift decision, promptitude,

self-command, and all the military virtues in the highest degree. The one thing that he needed was to be 'strong and courageous'; and over and over again in this chapter you will find that injunction pealed into his ears. He is the type of the militant servant of the Lord, and the charge to him embodies the duties of all such.

I. We have here the duty of courageous strength.

Christianity has altered the perspective of human virtues, has thrown the gentler ones into prominence altogether unknown before, and has dimmed the brilliancy of the old heroic type of character; but it has not struck those virtues out of its list. Whilst the perspective is altered, there is as much need in the lowliest Christian life for the loftiest heroism as ever there was. For in no mere metaphor, but in grim earnest, all Christian progress is conflict, and we have to fight, not only with the evils that are within, but, if we would be true to the obligations of our profession and loyal to the commands of our Master, we have to take our part in the great campaign which He has inaugurated and is ever carrying on against every abuse and oppression, iniquity and sin, that grinds down the world and makes our brethren miserable and servile. So, then, in these words we have directions in regard to a side of the Christian character, indispensable to-day as ever, and the lack of which cannot be made up for by any amount of sweet and contemplative graces.

Jesus Christ is the type of both. The Conqueror of Canaan and the Redeemer of the world bear the same name. The Jesus whom we trust was a Joshua. And let us learn the lesson that neither the conqueror of the typical and material land of promise nor the Redeemer who has won the everlasting heaven for our

portion could do their work without the heroic side of human excellence being manifestly developed. Do you remember 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem'? Do you remember that the Apostle whom a hasty misconception has thought of as the gentlest of the Twelve, because he had most to say about love, is the Apostle that more emphatically than any other rings into our ears over and over again the thought of the Christ, militant and victorious, the Hero as well as the patient Sufferer, the 'Captain of our salvation'? And so let us recognise how both the gentler and the stronger graces, the pacific and the warlike side of human excellence, have their highest development in Jesus Christ, and learn that the firmest strength must be accompanied with the tenderest love and swathed in meekest gentleness. As another Apostle has it in his pregnant, brief injunctions, ringing and laconic like a general's word of command, 'Quit you like men! be strong! let all your deeds be done in love!' Braid the two things together, for the mightiest strength is the love that conquers hate, and the only love that is worthy of a man is the love that is strong to contend and to overcome.

'Be strong.' Then strength is a duty; then weakness is a sin. Then the amount of strength that we possess and wield is regulated by ourselves. We have our hands on the sluice. We may open it to let the whole full tide run in, or we may close it till a mere dribble reaches us. For the strength which *is* strength, and not merely weakness in a fever, is a strength derived, and ours because derived. The Apostle gives the complete version of the exhortation when he says: 'Finally, my brethren,' that Omega of command which is the Alpha of performance, 'be strong in the Lord

and in the power of His might.' Let Christ's strength in. Open the heart wide that it may come. Keep yourself in continual touch with God, the fountain of all power. Trust is strength, because trust touches the Rock of Ages.

For this reason the commandment to be strong and of good courage is in the text based upon this: 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.' Our strength depends on ourselves, because our strength is the fruit of our faith. And if we live with Him, grasping His hand and, in the realising consciousness of our own weakness, looking beyond ourselves, then power will come to us above our desire and equal to our need. The old victories of faith will be reproduced in us when we say with the ancient king, 'Lord! We know not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee.' Then He will come to us, to make us 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' 'Wait on the Lord and He will strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.'

But courage is duty, too, as well as strength. Power and the consciousness of power do not always go together. In regard to the strength of nature, courage and might are quite separable. There may be a strong coward and a weak hero. But in the spiritual region, strength and courage do go together. The consciousness of the divine power with us, and that alone, will make us bold with a boldness that has no taint of levity and presumption mingled with it, and never will overestimate its own strength. The charge to Joshua, then, not only insists upon the duty of strength, but on the duty of conscious strength, and on the duty of measuring the strength that is at my back with the weakness that is against me, and of being bold because I know that

more and 'greater is He that is with me than are they that be with them.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the exhortations here. Now look next at the duty of implicit obedience to the word of command.

That is another soldierly virtue, the exercise of which sheds a nobility over the repulsive horrors of the battlefield. Joshua had to be fitted to command by learning to obey, and, like that other soldier whose rough trade had led him to some inkling of Christ's authority by its familiarising him with the idea of the strange power of the word of command, had to realise that he himself was 'under authority' before he could issue his orders.

Courage and strength come first, and on them follows the command to do all according to the law, to keep it without deflection to right or left, and to meditate on it day and night. These two virtues make the perfect soldier—courage and obedience. Daring and discipline must go together, and to know how to follow orders is as essential as to know how to despise dangers.

But the connection between these two, as set forth in this charge, is not merely that they must co-exist, but that courage and strength are needed for, and are to find their noblest field of exercise in, absolute acceptance of, and unhesitating, swift, complete, uncomplaining obedience to, everything that is discerned to be God's will and our duty.

For the Christian soldier, then, God's law is his marching orders. The written word, and especially the Incarnate Word, are our law of conduct. The whole science of our warfare and plan of campaign are there. We have not to take our orders from men's lips, but we must often disregard them, that we may

listen to the 'Captain of our salvation.' The soldier stands where his officer has posted him, and does what he was bid, no matter what may happen. Only one voice can relieve him. Though a thousand should bid him flee, and his heart should echo their advices, he is recreant if he deserts his post at the command of any but him who set him there. Obedience to others is mutiny. Nor does the Christian need another law to supplement that which Christ has given him in His pattern and teaching. Men have appended huge comments to it, and have softened some of its plain precepts which bear hard on popular sins. But the Lawgiver's law is one thing, and the lawyers' explanations which explain it away or darken what was clear enough, however unwelcome, are quite another. Christ has given us Himself, and therein has given a sufficient directory for conduct and conflict which fits close to all our needs, and will prove definite and practical enough if we honestly try to apply it.

The application of Christ's law to daily life takes some courage, and is the proper field for the exercise of Christian strength. 'Be very courageous that thou mayest observe.' If you are not a bold Christian you will very soon get frightened out of obedience to your Master's commandments. Courage, springing from the realisation of God's helping strength, is indispensable to make any man, in any age, live out thoroughly and consistently the principles of the law of Jesus Christ. No man in *this* generation will work out a punctual obedience to what he knows to be the will of God, without finding out that all the 'Canaanites' are not dead yet; but that there are enough of them left to make a very thorny life for the persistent follower of Jesus Christ.

And not only is there courage needed for the application of the principles of conduct which God has given us, but you will never have them handy for swift application unless, in many a quiet hour of silent, solitary, patient meditation you have become familiar with them. The recruit that has to learn on the battle-field how to use his rifle has a good chance of being dead before he has mastered the mysteries of firing. And Christian people that have their Christian principles to dig out of the Bible when the necessity comes, will likely find that the necessity is past before they have completed the excavation. The actual battle-field is no place to learn drill. If a soldier does not know how his sword hangs, and cannot get at it in a moment, he will probably draw it too late.

I am afraid that the practice of such meditation as is meant here has come to be, like the art of making ecclesiastical stained glass, almost extinct in modern times. You have all so many newspapers and magazines to read that the Bible has a chance of being shoved out of sight, except on Sundays and in chapels. The 'meditating' that is enjoined in my text is no mere intellectual study of Scripture, either from an antiquarian or a literary or a theological point of view, but it is the mastering of the principles of conduct as laid down there, and the appropriating of all the power for guidance and for sustaining which that word of the Lord gives. Meditation, the familiarising ourselves with the ethics of Scripture, and with the hopes and powers that are treasured in Jesus Christ, so that our minds are made up upon a great many thorny questions as to what we ought to do, and that when crises or dangers come, as they have a knack of coming, very suddenly, and are sprung upon us unexpectedly, we shall be able, without

much difficulty, or much time spent in perplexed searching, to fall back upon the principles that decide our conduct—that is essential to all successful and victorious Christian life.

And it is the secret of all blessed Christian life. For there is a lovely echo of these vigorous words of command to Joshua in a very much more peaceful form in the 1st Psalm: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, . . . but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night'—the very words that are employed in the text to describe the duty of the soldier—therefore 'all that he doeth shall prosper.'

III. That leads to the last thought here—the sure victory of such bold obedience.

'Thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest'; 'Thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success,' or, as the last word might be rendered, 'then shalt thou *act wisely*.' You may not get victory from an earthly point of view, for many a man that lives strong and courageous and joyfully obeying God's law, as far as he knows it and because he loves the Lawgiver, goes through life, and finds that, as far as the world's estimate is concerned, there is nothing but failure as his portion. Ah! but the world's way is not the true way of estimating victory. 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,' said Jesus Christ when within arm's-length of the Cross. And His way is the way in which we must conquer the world, if we conquer it at all. The success which my text means is the carrying out of conscientious convictions of God's will into practice. That is the only success that is worth talking about or looking for. The man that succeeds in obeying and translating God's

will into conduct is the victor, whatever be the outward fruits of his life. He may go out of the field beaten, according to the estimate of men that can see no higher than their own height, and little further than their own finger tips can reach; he may himself feel that the world has gone past him, and that he has not made much of it; he may have to lie down at last unknown, poor, with all his bright hopes that danced before him in childhood gone, and sore beaten by the enemies; but if he is able to say in the strength that Christ gives, 'I have finished my course; I have kept the faith,' his 'way has prospered,' and he has had 'good success.' 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

THE UNTRODDEN PATH AND THE GUIDING ARK

'Come not near unto the ark, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore. — JOSHUA III. 4.

It was eminently true of Israel that they had 'not passed this way heretofore,' inasmuch as the path which was opening before them, through the oozy bed of the river, had never been seen by human eye, nor trodden by man's foot. Their old leader was dead. There were only two of the whole host that had ever been out of the desert in their lives. They had a hard task before them. Jericho lay there, gleaming across the plain, among the palm-trees, backed by the savage cliffs, up the passes in which they would have to fight their way. So that we need not wonder that, over and over again, in these early chapters of this book, the advice is reiterated, 'Be of good courage. Be strong

and fear not!' They needed special guidance, and they received very special guidance, and my text tells us what they had to do, in order to realise the full blessing and guidance that was given them. 'Let there be a space of 2000 cubits by measure between you and the ark'—three-quarters of a mile or thereabouts—'do not press close upon the heels of the bearers, for you will not be able to see where they are going if you crowd on them. Be patient. Let the course of the ark disclose itself before you try to follow it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go, for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'

I. Note the untrodden path.

I suppose that most of us have to travel a very well-worn road, and that our course, in the cases of all except those in early life, is liker that of a millhorse than an untrodden path. Most of us are continually treading again in the prints of our own footsteps. A long, weary stretch of monotonous duties, and the repetition of the same things to-day that we did yesterday is the destiny of most of us.

Some of us, perhaps, may be standing upon the verge of some new scenes in our lives. Some of you young people may have come up to a great city for the first time to carve out a position for yourselves, and are for the first time encompassed by the temptations of being unknown in a crowd. Some of you may be in new domestic circumstances, some with new sorrows, or tasks, or difficulties pressing upon you, calling for wisdom and patience. It is quite likely that there may be some who, in the most prosaic and literal sense of the words, are entering on a path altogether new and untrodden. But they will be in the minority, and for the most of us the days that were full of new possibilities

are at an end, and we have to expect little more than the monotonous repetition of the habitual, humdrum duties of mature life. We have climbed the winding paths up the hill, and most of us are upon the long plateau that stretches unvaried, until it begins to dip at the further edge. And some of us are going down that other side of the hill.

But whatever may be the variety in regard to the mere externals of our lives, how true it is about us all that even the most familiar duties of to-day are not quite like the same duties when they had to be done yesterday; and that the path for each of us—though, as we go along, we find in it nothing new—is yet an untrodden path! For we are not quite the same as we were yesterday, though our work may be the same, and the difference in us makes it in some measure different.

But what mainly makes even the most well-beaten paths new at the thousandth time of traversing them is our ignorance of what may be waiting round the next turn of the road. The veil that hangs before and hides the future is a blessing, though we sometimes grumble at it, and sometimes petulantly try to make pinholes through it, and peep in to see a little of what is behind it. It brings freshness into our lives, and a possibility of anticipation, and even of wonder and expectation, that prevents us from stagnating. Even in the most habitual repetition of the same tasks 'ye have not passed this way heretofore.' And life for every one of us is still full of possibilities so great and so terrible that we may well feel that the mist that covers the future is a blessing and a source of strength for us all.

Our march through time is like that of men in a

mist, in which things loom in strangely distorted shapes, unlike their real selves, until we get close up to them, and only then do we discover them.

So for us all the path is new and unknown by reason of the sudden surprises that may be sprung upon us, by reason of the sudden temptations that may start up at any moment in our course, by reason of the earthquakes that may shatter the most solid-seeming lives, by reason of the sudden calamities that may fall upon us. The sorrows that we anticipate seldom come, and those that do come are seldom anticipated. The most fatal bolts are generally from the blue. One flash, all unlooked for, is enough to blast the tree in all its leafy pride. Many of us, I have no doubt, can look back to times in our lives when, without anticipation on our parts, or warning from anything outside of us, a smiting hand fell upon some of our blessings. The morning dawned upon the gourd in full vigour of growth, and in the evening it was stretched yellow and wilted upon the turf. Dear brethren, anything may come out of that dark cloud through which our life's course has to pass, and there are some things concerning which all that we know is that they must come.

These are very old threadbare thoughts; I dare say you think it was not worth your while to come to hear them, nor mine to speak them; but if we would lay them to heart, and realise how true it is about every step of our earthly course that 'ye have not passed this way heretofore,' we should complain less than we do of the weariness and prosaic character of our commonplace lives, and feel that all was mystical and great and awful; and yet most blessed in its possibilities and its uncertainties.

II. Note, again, the guiding ark.

It was a new thing that the ark should become the guide of the people. All through the wilderness, according to the history, it had been carried in the centre of the march, and had had no share in the direction of the course. That had been done by the pillar of cloud. But, just as the manna ceased when the tribes got across the Jordan and could eat the bread of the land, the miracle ending and they being left to trust to ordinary means of supply at the earliest possible moment, so there ensued an approximation to ordinary guidance, which is none the less real because it is granted without miracle. The pillar of cloud ceased to move before the people in the crossing of the Jordan, and its place was taken by the material symbol of the presence of God, which contained the tables of the law as the basis of the covenant. And that ark moved at the commandment of the leader Joshua, for he was the mouthpiece of the divine will in the matter. And so when the ark moved at the bidding of the leader, and became the guide of the people, there was a kind of a drop down from the pure supernatural of the guiding pillar.

For us a similar thing is true. Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God. For what was the ark? the symbol of the divine Presence; and Christ is the reality of the divine Presence with men. The whole content of that ark was the 'law of the Lord,' and Jesus Christ is the embodied law of the present God. The ark was the sign that God had entered into this covenant with these people, and that they had a right to say to Him, 'Thou art our God, and we are Thy people,' and the same double assurance of reciprocal possession and mutual delight in possession is granted to us in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So He becomes the guiding Ark, the Shepherd of Israel. His presence and will are our directors. The law, which is contained and incorporated in Him, is that by which we are to walk. The covenant which He has established in His own blood between God and man contains in itself not only the direction for conduct, but also the motives which will impel us to walk where and as He enjoins.

And so, every way we may say, by His providences which He appoints, by His example which He sets us, by His gracious word in which He sums up all human duties in the one sweet obligation, 'Follow Me,' and even more by His Spirit that dwells in us, and whispers in our ears, 'This is the way; walk ye in it,' and enlightens every perplexity, and strengthens all feebleness, and directs our footsteps into the way of peace; that living and personal Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is still the guide of waiting and docile hearts. Jesus Christ's one word to us is, 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me. And where I am'—of course, seeing he is a follower—'there shall also My servant be.'

The one Pattern for us, the one Example that we need to follow, the one Strength in our perplexities, the true Director of our feet, is that dear Lord, if we will only listen to Him. And that direction will be given to us in regard to the trifles, as in regard to the great things of our lives.

III. And so the last thought that is here is the watchful following.

'Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye ought to go.' In a shipwreck, the chances are that the boats will be swamped by the people scrambling into them in too great a hurry. In the

Christian life most of the mistakes that people make arise from their not letting the ark go far enough ahead of them before they gather up their belongings and follow it. An impatience of the half-declared divine will, a running before we are sent, an acting before we are quite sure that God wills us to do so-and-so, are at the root of most of the failures of Christian effort, and of a large number of the miseries of Christian men. If we would only have patience! Three-quarters of a mile the ark went ahead before a man lifted a foot to follow it, and there was no mistake possible then.

Now do not be in a hurry to act. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' We are all impatient of uncertainty, either in opinion or in conduct; but if you are not quite sure what God wants you to do, you may be quite sure that He does not at present want you to do anything. Wait till you see what He does wish you to do. Better, better far, to spend hours in silent—although people that know nothing about what we are doing may call it indolent—waiting for the clear declaration of God's will, than to hurry on paths which, after we have gone on them far enough to make it a mortification and a weariness to turn back, we shall find out to have been not His at all, but only our own mistakes as to where the ark would have us go.

And that there may be this patience the one thing needful—as, indeed, it is the one thing needful for all strength of all kinds in the Christian life—is the rigid suppression of our own wills. That is the secret of goodness, and its opposite is the secret of evil. To live by my own will is to die. Nothing but blunders, nothing but miseries, nothing but failures, nothing but remorse, will be the fruit of such a life. And a great many of

us who call ourselves Christians are not Christians in the sense of having Christ's will for our absolute law, and keeping our own will entirely in subordination thereto. As is the will, so is the man, and whoever does not bow himself absolutely, and hush all the babble of his own inclinations and tastes and decisions, in order that that great Voice may speak, has small chance of ever walking in the paths of righteousness, or finding that his ways please the Lord.

Suppress your own wills, dwell near God, that you may hear His lightest whisper. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' What is the use of the glance of an eye if the man for whom it is meant is half a mile off, and staring about him at everything except the eye that would guide? And that is what some of us that call ourselves Christian people are. God might look guidance at us for a week, and we should never know that He was doing it; we have so many other things to look after. And we are so far away from Him that it would need a telescope for us to see His face. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' Keep near Him, and you will not lack direction.

And so, dear brethren, if we stay ourselves on, and wait patiently for, Him, and are content to do what He wishes, and never to run without a clear commission, nor to act without a full conviction of duty, then the old story of my text will repeat itself in our daily life, as well as in the noblest form in the last act of life, which is death. The Lord will move before us and open a safe, dry path for us between the heaped waters; and where the feet of our great High Priest, bearing the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, stood, amidst the slime and the mud, we may plant our firm feet on the stones that He has left there. And

so the stream of life, like the river of death, will be parted for Christ's followers, and they will pass over on dry ground, 'until all the people are passed clean over Jordan.'

'THE WATERS SAW THEE; THEY WERE AFRAID'

'And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you. 6. And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. 7. And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. 8. And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan. 9. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God. 10. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. 11. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. 12. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. 13. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap. 14. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; 15. And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) 16. That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. 17. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.'—*JOSHUA* iii. 5-17.

THE arrangement of the narrative of the passage of Jordan, which occupies chapters iii. and iv., is remarkable, and has led to suggestions of interpolation and blending of two accounts, which are quite unnecessary. It is divided into four sections,—the preparations (*Joshua* iii. 1-6), the passage (*Joshua* iii. 7-17), the lifting of the memorial stones from the river's bed and the

fixing of one set of them in it (Joshua iv. 1-14), the return of the waters, and the erection of the second set of memorial stones at Gilgal (Joshua iv. 15-24).

Each section closes with a summary of the whole transaction, after the common manner of Old Testament history, which gives to a hasty reader the impression of confusion and repetition; but a little attention shows a very symmetrical arrangement, negating the possibility of interpolation. The last three sections are all built on the same lines. In each there is a triple division,—God's command to Joshua, Joshua's communication of it to the people, and the actual fact, fulfilling these. So each stage passes thrice before the view, and the impressiveness of the history is heightened by our seeing it first in the mirror of the divine Word, and then in the orders of the commander, before we see it as a thing actually happening.

Verses 5 and 6 of the chapter belong to the section which deals with the preparation. General instructions had been already issued that the host was to follow the ark, leaving two thousand cubits between them and it; but nothing had been said as to how Jordan was to be crossed. No doubt many a question and doubt had been muttered by the watch-fires, as the people looked at the muddy, turbid stream, swirling in flood. The spies probably managed to swim it, but that was a feat worthy to be named in the epitaph of heroes (1 Chron. xii. 15), and impossible for the crowd of all ages and both sexes which followed Joshua. There was the rushing stream, swollen as it always is in harvest. How were they to get over? And if the people of Jericho, right over against them, chose to fall upon them as they were struggling across, what could hinder utter defeat? No doubt, all that was canvassed,

in all sorts of tones; but no inkling of the miracle seems to have been given.

God often opens His hand by one finger at a time, and leaves us face to face with some plain but difficult duty, without letting us see the helps to its performance, till we need to use them. If we go right on the road which He has traced out, it will never lead us into a blind alley. The mountains will part before us as we come near what looked their impassable wall; and some narrow gorge or other, wide enough to run a track through, but not wide enough to be noticed before we are close on it, will be sure to open. The attitude of expectation of God's help, while its nature is unrevealed, is kept up in Joshua's last instruction. The people are bidden to 'sanctify themselves, because to-morrow the Lord will do wonders' among them. That sanctifying was not external, but included the hallowing of spirit by docile waiting for His intervention, and by obedience while the manner of it was hidden. The secret of to-morrow is partly made known, and the faith of the people is nourished by the mystery remaining, as well as by the light given. The best security for to-morrow's wonders is to-day's sanctifying.

The command to the priests discloses to them a little more, in bidding them pass over before the people, but the additional disclosure would only be an additional trial of faith; for the silence as to how so impossible a command was to be made possible is absolute. The swollen river had obliterated all fords; and how were priests, staggering under the weight of the ark on their shoulders, to 'pass over'? The question is not answered till the ark is on their shoulders. To-day often sees to-morrow's duty without seeing how it is to be done. But the bearers of the ark need never

fear but that the God to whom it belongs will take care of it and of them. The last sentence of verse 6 is the anticipatory summary which closes each section.

In verses 7-17 we have the narrative of the actual crossing, in its three divisions of God's command (vs. 7-8), Joshua's repetition of it (vs. 9-13), and the historical fact (vs. 14-17). The final instructions were only given on the morning of the day of crossing. The report of God's commands given in verses 7 and 8 is condensed, as is evident from the fuller statement of them in Joshua's address to the people, which immediately follows. In it Joshua is fully aware of the manner of the miracle and of the details of the crossing, but we have no record of his having received them. The summary of that eventful morning's instructions to him emphasises first the bearing of the miracle on his reputation. The passage of the Red Sea had authenticated the mission of Moses to the past generation, who, in consequence of it, 'believed God and His servant Moses.' The new generation are to have a parallel authentication of Joshua's commission. It is noteworthy that this is not the purpose of the miracle which the leader announces to the people in verse 10. It was a message from God to himself, a kind of gracious whisper meant for his own encouragement. What a thought to fill a man's heart with humble devotion, that God would work such a wonder in order to demonstrate that He was with him! And what a glimpse of more to follow lay in that promise, 'This day will I *begin* to magnify thee!'

The command to the priests in verse 8 is also obviously condensed; for Joshua's version of it, which follows, is much more detailed, and contains particular

instructions, which must have been derived from the divine word to him on that morning.

We may pass on, then, to the second division of the narrative; namely, Joshua's communication of God's commands to the people. Observe the form which the purpose of the miracle assumes there. It is the confirmation of the divine Presence, not with the leader, but with the people and their consequent victory. Joshua grasped the inmost meaning of God's Word to himself, and showed noble self-suppression, when he thus turned the direction of the miracle. The true servant of God knows that God is with him, not for his personal glorification, but for the welfare of God's people, and cares little for the estimation in which men hold him, if they will only believe that the conquering God is with them. We too often make great leaders and teachers in the church opaque barriers to hide God from us, instead of transparent windows through which He shines upon His people. We are a great deal more ready to say, 'God is with him,' than to add, 'and therefore God is with us, in our Joshuas, and without them.'

Observe the grand emphasis of that name, 'the living God,' tacitly contrasted with the dead idols of the enemies, and sealing the assurance of His swift and all-conquering might. Observe, too, the triumphant contempt in the enumeration of the many tribes of the foe with their barbarous names. Five of them had been enough, when named by the spies' trembling lips, to terrify the congregation, but here the list of the whole seven but strengthens confidence. Faith delights to look steadily at its enemies, knowing that the one Helper is more than they all. This catalogue breathes the same spirit as Paul's rapturous list of the foes

impotent to separate from the love of God. Mark, too, the long-drawn-out designation of the ark, with its accumulation of nouns, which grammatical purists have found difficult,—‘the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth’; where it leads they need not fear to follow. It was the pledge of His presence, it contained the Ten Words on which His covenant was concluded. That covenant enlisted on their side Him who was Lord of the swollen river as of all the fierce clans beyond; and with His ark in front, their victory was sure. If ever the contemplation of His power and covenant relation was in place, it was on that morning, as Israel stood ranked for the march that was to lead them through Jordan, and to plant their feet on the soil of Canaan. Nor must we omit the peculiar appropriateness of this solemn designation, on the occasion of the ark’s first becoming the leader of the march. Hitherto it had been carried in the centre; now it was moved to the van, and took the place of the pillar, which blazed no more. But the guidance was no less divine. The simple coffer which Bezaleel had made was as august and reliable a symbol of God’s presence as the pillar; and the tables of the law, shut in it, were henceforth to be the best directors of the nation.

Then follows the command to elect twelve representatives of the tribes, for a purpose not yet explained; and then, at the last moment, the manner of crossing is disclosed, to the silencing of wise doubters and the confirmation of ignorant faith. The brief anticipatory announcement of the miracle puts stress on the arrest of the waters at the instant when the priests’ feet touched them, and tells what is to befall the arrested torrent above the point where the ark stood, saying

nothing about the lower stretch of the river, and just hinting by one word 'heap,' the parallel between this miracle and that of the passing of the Red Sea: 'The floods stood upright as an heap' (Exod. xv. 8).

Verses 14-17 narrate the actual crossing. One long sentence, like the roll of an Atlantic wave, or a long-drawn shout of triumph, masses together the stages of the march; the breaking up of the encampment; the solemn advance of the ark, watched by the motionless crowd; its approach to the foaming stream, running bank-full, as is its wont in the early harvest months; the decisive moment when the naked feet of the priests were dipped in the water. What a hush of almost painful expectation would fall on the gazers! Then, with a rush of triumph, the long sentence pours on, like a river escaping from some rocky gorge, and tells the details of the transcendent fact. Looking up stream, the water 'stood'; and, as the flow above went on, it was dammed up, and, as would appear, swept back to a point not now known, but apparently some miles up. Looking down the course, the water flowed naturally to the Dead Sea; and, in effect, the whole bed southwards was quickly left bare, giving room for the advance of the people with wide-extended front, while the priests, with the ark on their shoulders, stood silent in the midst of the bed, between the heaped waters and the hasting host. Verse 17 gives the usual summary sentence, which partly anticipates what is still to follow, but here comes in with special force, as gathering up the whole wonderful scene, and recounting once more, and not without a ring of astonished triumph, how the priests stood firm on dry ground in that strange place, 'until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan.'

From verses 7 and 10 we learn the purpose of this miracle as being twofold. It was intended to stamp the seal of God's approbation on Joshua, and to hearten the people by the assurance of God's fighting for them. The leader was thereby put on the level of Moses, the people, on that of the generation before whom the Red Sea had been divided. The parallel with that event is obvious and significant. The miracle which led Israel into the wilderness is repeated as they pass from it. The first stage of their deliverance and the second are begun with analogous displays of divine power. The same arm which cleft the sea is stretched out, after all sins, for the new generation, and 'is not shortened that it cannot save.' God does not disdain to duplicate His wonders, even for very unworthy servants. The unchanging, long-suffering patience, and the unwearied strength to which all generations in succession can turn with confidence, are wonderfully set forth by these two miracles. And though we have passed into the higher stage, where miracles have ceased, the principle which dictated the parallelism still holds good, and we too can look back to all these ancient wonders, and be sure that they are done over and over again according to our needs. 'As we have heard, so have we seen,' might have been Israel's song that day, as it may be ours every day.

The beautiful application made of the parted waters of Jordan in Christian literature, which sees in them the prophecy of conquered death, is perhaps scarcely in accordance with truth, for the divided Jordan was the introduction, not to peace, but to warfare. But it is too deeply impressed on the heart to be lightly put aside, and we may well allow faith and hope to discern in the stream, whose swollen waters shrink backwards

as soon as the ark is borne into their turbid and swift current, an emblem of that dark flood that rolled between the host of God and their home, and was dried up as soon as the pierced foot of the Christ touched its cold waters.

‘What ailest thee, thou sea, that thou fleest; thou Jordan, that thou turnest back?’ Christ has gone up before us. He has shaken His hand over the river, and caused men to go over dry shod.

STONES CRYING OUT

‘For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hastened and passed over. 11. And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people. 12. And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: 13. About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14. On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. 15. And the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, 16. Command the priests that bare the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. 17. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. 18. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. 19. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. 20. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. 21. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? 22. Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. 23. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which He dried up from before us, until we were gone over: 24. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.’—JOSHUA iv. 10-24.

THIS chapter is divided into two sections. The first (from verses 1 to 14) has as its main subject the bringing up of the twelve memorial stones from the bed of Jordan; the second (verse 15 to the end) gives the conclusion of the whole incident. The plan of arrange-

ment, already pointed out in a former chapter, is very plain in this. Each section has God's commands to Joshua, Joshua's to the people, and the execution of these. To each is appended a summary, which anticipates the more detailed particulars that follow. Our text begins in the middle of the first section, but we must glance at the preceding verses. These tell how, when the people were all across, Joshua, who had apparently remained on the eastern bank with the twelve representatives of the tribes, received God's command to tell these the purpose for which they had been chosen, and to set them to execute it. This additional instruction is the explanation of the apparent discrepancy between Joshua iii. 12 and iv. 2. Verses 4-8 tell Joshua's communication of the instructions to the men; verse 8 narrates the execution of them by each man's wrenching up from the river's bed a great stone, with which he toiled through the muddy ooze to the western shore, and thence over the hot plain to Gilgal, where the host camped; verse 9 tells that twelve other stones were set up where the priests had stood, and were visible at some time after date, when it was written; but when that was, or whether the verse is part of the original or a later note, we cannot say. At any rate, there were two memorials, one on the bank, one in the stream—'a grand jury of great stones,' as Thomas Fuller calls them. There is no difficulty in supposing that the monument in the river was firm enough to resist its current, and high enough to be visible either above the surface or beneath the ordinarily shallow water.

I. The first picture here brought before us is that of the motionless ark in the midst of what had been Jordan. There is an obvious intention to con-

trast the stillness of the priests, bearing it on their shoulders, and standing rooted in that strange place all these long hours, with the hurry around. 'The priests stood . . . and the people hastened.' However broad the front and swift the march, the crossing must have taken many hours. The haste was not from fear, but eagerness. It was 'an industrious speed and mannerly quickness, as not willing to make God wait upon them, in continuing a miracle longer than necessity did require.' When all were over, then came the twelve and Joshua, who would spend some time in gathering the stones and rearing the memorial in the river-bed. Through all the stir the ark was still. Over all the march it watched. So long as one Israelite was in the channel it remained, a silent presence, to ensure his safety. It let their rate of speed determine the length of its standing there. It waited for the slowest foot and the weariest laggard. God makes His 'very present help' of the same length as our necessities, and lets us beat the time to which He conforms. Not till the last loiterer has struggled to the farther shore does He cease by His presence to keep His people safe on the strange road which by His presence He has opened for them.

The silent presence of the ark is enough to dam up the stream. There is vehement action around, but the cause of it all is in absolute repose. God moves all things, Himself unmoved. He 'worketh hitherto,' and no intensity of energy breaks the depth of His perfect rest. His activity implies no effort, and is followed by no exhaustion. The ark is still, while it holds back a swollen river for hours. The centre of the swiftest revolution is a point of rest.

The form of the miracle was a condescension to weak faith, to which help was ministered by giving sense

something to grasp. It was easier to believe that the torrent would not rush down on them when they could look at the priests standing there motionless, with the visible symbol of God's presence on their shoulders. The ark was no more the cause of the miracle than were its carriers; but, just as Jesus helped one blind man by laying moistened earth on his eyes, and another by sending him to Siloam to wash, so God did here. Children learn best when they have something to look at. Sight is sometimes the servant of faith.

We need not dwell on the summary, beginning with verse 11, which anticipates the subject of the next section, and adds that the fighting men of the tribes who had already received their inheritance on the east bank of Jordan, loyally kept their promise, and marched with their brethren to the campaign.

II. Verses 15-18 finish the story with the return of the waters to their bed. The triple division appears again. First God commands Joshua, who then transmits the command to the people, who, in turn, then obey. And thus at each stage the divine causality, Joshua's delegated but absolute authority, and the people's prompt obedience, are signalised; and the whole incident, in all its parts, is set forth as on the one hand a conspicuous instance of God's interposition, and, on the other, of Israel's willing service.

We can fancy how the people who had reached the western shore lined the bank, gazing on the group in the channel, who still stood waiting God's command to relieve them at their post. The word comes at last, and is immediately obeyed. May we not learn the lesson to stand fixed and patient wherever God sets us, as long as He does not call us thence? God's priests should be like the legionary on guard in Pompeii, who

stuck to his post while the ashes were falling thick, and was smothered by them, rather than leave his charge without his commander's orders. One graphic word pictures the priests lifting, or, as it might be translated, 'plucking,' the soles of their feet from the slimy bottom into which they had settled down by reason of long standing still. They reach the bank, marching as steadily with their sacred burden as might be over so rough and slippery a road. The first to enter were the last to leave the river's bed. God's ark 'goes before us,' and 'is our rearward.' He besets us behind and before, and all dangerous service is safe if begun and ended in Him. The one point made prominent is the instantaneous rush back of the impatient torrent as soon as the curb was taken off. Like some horse rejoicing to be free, the tawny flood pours down, and soon everything looks 'as aforetime,' except for the new rock, piled by human hands, round which the waters chafed. The dullest would understand what had wrought the miracle when they saw the immediate consequence of the ark's leaving its place. Cause and effect seldom come thus close together in God's dealings; but sometimes He lets us see them as near each other as the lightning and the thunder, that we may learn to trace them in faith, when centuries part them. How the people would gaze as the hurrying stream covered up their path, and would look across to the further shore, almost doubting if they had really stood there that morning! They were indeed 'Hebrews'—men from the other side—now, and would set themselves to the dangerous task before them with courage. 'Well begun is half done'; and God would not divide the river for them to thrust them into a tiger's den, where they would be torn to pieces. Retreat was impossible now. A new page in their history was

turned. The desert was as unreachable as Egypt. The passage of the Jordan rounded off the epoch which the passage of the Red Sea introduced, and began a new era.

That parallelism of the two crossings is suggested by the notice of date in verse 19. 'The tenth day of the first month' was just forty years to a day since the first Paschal lamb had been chosen, and four days short of the Passover, which was solemnised at Gilgal (Joshua v. 10) where they encamped that night. It was a short march from the point of crossing, and a still shorter from Jericho. It would have been easy to fall upon the invaders as they straggled across the river, but no attempt was made to dispute the passage, though, no doubt, many a keen pair of eyes watched it from the neighbouring hills. In the beginning of the next chapter we are told why there was this singular supineness. 'Their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more,' or, in more modern language, panic laid hold of the enemy, and they could not pluck up courage to oppose the advance of Israel. If we add this result to those mentioned in chapter iii., we find sufficient motive for the miracle to take it out of the class of purposeless, legendary wonders. Given the importance of Israel as the depositaries of revelation, there is nothing unreasonable in a miracle which so powerfully contributed to their conquest of Canaan, and we have yet to learn that there is anything unreasonable in the belief that they *were* the depositaries of revelation. The fundamental postulate of the Old Testament is a supernatural revelation, and that opens the door for any miracle needful for its accomplishment. It is folly to seek to conciliate by minimising the miraculous element. However much may be thrown out to the wolves, they will

not cease to pursue and show their teeth. We should be very slow to pronounce on what is worthy of God ; but any man who believes in a divine revelation, given to the world through Israel, may well believe in such a miracle as this at such a moment of their history.

III. The memorial stones (verses 20-24). Gilgal, the first encampment, lay defenceless in the open plain, and the first thing to be done would be to throw up some earthwork round the camp. It seems to have been the resting-place of the ark and probably of the non-combatants, during the conquest, and to have derived thence a sacredness which long clung to it, and finally led, singularly enough, to its becoming a centre of idolatrous worship. The rude circle of unhewn stones without inscription was, no doubt, exactly like the many prehistoric monuments found all over the world, which forgotten races have raised to keep in everlasting remembrance forgotten fights and heroes. It was a comparatively small thing; for each stone was but a load for one man, and it would seem mean enough by the side of Stonehenge or Carnac, just as Israel's history is on a small scale, as compared with the world-embracing empires of old. Size is not greatness; and Joshua's little circle told a more wonderful story than its taller kindred, or Egyptian obelisks or colossi.

These grey stones preached at once the duty of remembering, and the danger of forgetting, the past mercies of God. When they were reared, they would seem needless; but the deepest impressions get filled up by degrees, as the river of time deposits its sands on them. We do not forget pain so quickly as joy, and most men have a longer and keener remembrance of their injurers than of their benefactors, human or

divine. The stones were set up because Israel remembered, but also lest Israel should forget. We often think of the Jews as monsters of ingratitude; but we should more truly learn the lesson of their history, if we regarded them as fair, average men, and asked ourselves whether our recollection of God's goodness to us is much more vivid than theirs. Unless we make distinct and frequent efforts to recall, we shall certainly forget 'all His benefits.' The cultivation of thankful remembrance is a very large part of practical religion; and it is not by accident that the Psalmist puts it in the middle, between hope and obedience, when he says, 'that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments' (Psalm lxxviii. 7).

The memorial stones further proclaimed the duty of parental instruction in God's mercies. They speak of a time when tradition was the vehicle of history; when books were rare, and monuments were relied upon to awaken curiosity which a father's words would satisfy. Notwithstanding all differences in means of obtaining knowledge, the old law remains in full force, that the parent is the natural and most powerful instructor in the ways of God. The Jewish father was not to send his child to some Levite or other to get his question answered, but was to answer it himself. I am afraid that a good many English parents, who call themselves Christians, are too apt to say, 'Ask your Sunday-school teacher,' when such questions are put to them. The decay of parental religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian households; and the happiest results would follow if Joshua's homely advice were attended to, 'Ye shall let your children know.'

The same principle which led to the erection of this simple monument reaches its highest and sacredest instance in the institution of the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus, with wonderful lowliness, condescends to avail Himself of material symbols in order to secure a firmer place in treacherous memories. He might well have expected that such stupendous love could never be forgotten; but He 'knoweth our frame,' and trusts some share in keeping His death vividly in the hearts of His people to the humble ministry of bread and wine. Strange that we should need to be reminded of the death which it is life to remember! Blessed that, needing it, we have the need so tenderly met, and that He does not disdain to accept loving memories which slumber till stirred by such poor reminders of His unspeakable love!

THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

'And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.'
JOSHUA v. 14.

THE army of Israel was just beginning a hard conflict under an untried leader. Behind them the Jordan barred their retreat, in front of them Jericho forbade their advance. Most of them had never seen a fortified city, and had no experience nor engines for a siege. So we may well suppose that many doubts and fears shook the courage of the host, as it drew around the doomed city. Their chief had his own heavy burden. He seems to have gone apart to meditate on what his next step was to be. Absorbed in thought, he lifts up his eyes mechanically, as brooding men will, not ex-

pecting to see anything, and is startled by the silent figure of 'a man with a sword drawn' in his hand, close beside him. There is nothing supernatural in his appearance; and the immediate thought of the leader is, 'Is this one of the enemy that has stolen upon my solitude?' So, promptly and boldly, he strides up to him with the quick challenge: 'Whose side are you on? Are you one of us, or from the enemy's camp?' And then the silent lips open. 'Upon neither the one nor the other. I am not on your side, you are on mine, for as *Captain* of the Lord's host, am I come up.' And then Joshua falls on his face, recognises his Commander-in-Chief, owns himself a subordinate, and asks for orders. 'What saith my Lord unto his servant?'

Now let us try to gather the meaning and the lessons of this striking incident.

I. I see in it a transient revelation of an eternal truth.

I believe, as the vast majority of careful students of the course of Old Testament revelation and its relation to the New Testament completion believe, that we have here not a record of the appearance of a created superhuman person, but that of a preliminary manifestation of the Eternal Word of God, who, in the fulness of time, 'became flesh and dwelt among us.'

You will observe that there run throughout the whole of the Old Testament notices of the occasional manifestation of a mysterious person who is named '*the Angel*,' 'the Angel of the Lord.' For instance, in the great scene in the wilderness, where the bush burned and was not consumed, he who appeared is named 'the Angel of the Lord'; and his lips declare 'I am that I am.' In like manner, soon after, the divine voice speaks to Moses of 'the Angel in whom is My name.'

When Balaam had his path blocked amongst the vineyards, it was a *replica* of the figure of my text that stayed his way, a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who spoke in autocratic and divine fashion. When the parents of Samson were apprised of the coming birth of the hero, it was 'the Angel of the Lord' that appeared to them, accepted their sacrifice, declared the divine will, and disappeared in a flame of fire from the altar. A psalm speaks of 'the Angel of the Lord' as encamping round about them that fear him, and delivering them. Isaiah tells us of the 'Angel of his face,' who was 'afflicted in all Israel's afflictions, and saved them.' And the last prophetic utterance of the Old Testament is most distinct and remarkable in its strange identification and separation of Jehovah and the Angel, when it says, 'the Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the Angel of the Covenant.' Now, if we put all these passages—and they are but select instances—if we put all these passages together, I think we cannot help seeing that there runs, as I said, throughout the whole of the Old Testament a singular strain of revelation in regard to a Person who, in a remarkable manner, is distinguished from the created hosts of angel beings, and also is distinguished from, and yet in name, attributes, and worship all but identified with, the Lord Himself.

If we turn to the narrative before us, we find there similar phenomena marked out. For this mysterious 'man with the sword drawn' in his hand, quotes the very words which were spoken at the bush, when he says, 'Loose thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' And by fair implication, He would have us to identify the persons in these two great theophanies. He ascribes to Himself, in the

further conversation in the next chapter, directly divine attributes, and is named by the sacred name: 'The Lord said unto Joshua, see, I have given into thy hand Jericho and its king.'

If we turn to the New Testament, we find that there under another image the same strain of thought is presented. The Word of God, who from everlasting 'was with God, and was God,' is represented as being the Agent of Creation, the Source of all human illumination, the Director of Providence, the Lord of the Universe. 'By him were all things, and in him all things consists.' So, surely, these two halves make a whole; and the Angel of the Lord, separate and yet so strangely identified with Jehovah, who at the crises of the nation's history, and stages of the development of the process of Revelation, is manifested, and the Eternal Word of God, whom the New Testament reveals to us, are one and the same.

This truth was transiently manifested in our text. The vision passed, the ground that was hallowed by His foot is undistinguished now in the sweltering plain round the mound that once was Jericho. But the fact remains, the humanity, that was only in appearance, and for a few minutes, assumed then, has now been taken up into everlasting union with the divine nature, and a Man reigns on the Throne, and is Commander of all who battle for the truth and the right. The eternal order of the universe is before us here.

It only remains to say a word in reference to the sweep of the command which our vision assigns to the Angel of the Lord. 'Captain of the Lord's host' means a great deal more than the true General of Israel's little army. It does mean that, or the words and the vision would cease to have relevance and bearing on

the moment's circumstances and need. But it includes also, as the usage of Scripture would sufficiently show, if it were needful to adduce instances of it, all the ordered ranks of loftier intelligent beings, and all the powers and forces of the universe. These are conceived of as an embattled host, comparable to an army in the strictness of their discipline and their obedience to a single will. It is the modern thought that the universe is a Cosmos and not a Chaos, an ordered unit, with the addition of the truth beyond the reach and range of science, that its unity is the expression of a personal will. It is the same thought which the centurion had, to Christ's wonder, when he compared his own power as an officer in a legion, where his will was implicitly obeyed, to the power of Christ over diseases and sorrows and miseries and death, and recognised that all these were His servants, to whom, if His autocratic lips chose to say 'Go,' they went, and if He said, 'Do this,' they did it.

So the Lord of the universe and its ordered ranks is Jesus Christ. That is the truth which was flashed from the unknown, like a vanishing meteor in the midnight, before the face of Joshua, and which stands like the noonday sun, unsetting and irradiating for us who live under the Gospel.

II. I see here the Leader of all the warfare against the world's evil.

'The Captain of the Lord's host.' He Himself takes part in the fight. He is not like a general who, on some safe knoll behind the army, sends his soldiers to death, and keeps his own skin whole. But He *has* fought, and He *is* fighting. Do you remember that wonderful picture in two halves, at the end of one of the Gospels, 'the Lord went up into Heaven and sat at

the right hand of God, . . . they went forth everywhere preaching the Word'? Strange contrast between the repose of the seated Christ and the toils of His peripatetic servants! Yes, strange contrast; but the next words harmonise the two halves of it; 'the Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.' The Leader does not so rest as that He does not fight; and the servants do not need so to fight, as that they cannot rest. Thus the old legends of many a land and tongue have a glorious truth in them to the eye of faith, and at the head of all the armies that are charging against any form of the world's misery and sin, there moves the form of the Son of Man, whose aid we have to invoke, even from His crowned repose at the right hand of God. 'Gird thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty, and in Thy majesty ride forth prosperously, and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things.'

If this, then, be for us, as truly as for Joshua and his host, a revelation of who is our true leader, surely all of us in our various degrees, and especially any of us who have any 'Quixotic crusade' for the world's good on our consciences and on our hands, may take the lessons and the encouragements that are here. Own your Leader; that is one plain duty. And recognise this fact, that by no other power than by His, and with no other weapons than those which He puts into our hands, in His Cross and meekness, can a world's evils be overcome, and the victory be won for the right and the truth. I have no faith in crusades which are not under the Captain of our salvation. And I would that the earnest men, and there are many of them, the laborious and the self-sacrificing men in many departments of philanthropy and benevolence and social re-

formation—who labour unaware of who is their Leader, and not dependent upon His help, nor trusting in His strength—would take to heart this vision of my text, and see beside them the ‘man with the drawn sword in his hand,’ the Christ with the ‘sharp two-edged sword going out of his mouth,’ by whom, and by whom alone, the world’s evil can be overcome and slain.

Own your General; submit to His authority; pick the weapons that He can bless; trust absolutely in His help. We *may* have, we *shall* have, in all enterprises for God and man that are worth doing, ‘need of patience,’ just as the army of Israel had to parade for six weary days round Jericho blowing their useless trumpets, whilst the impregnable walls stood firm, and the defenders flouted and jeered their aimless procession. But the seventh day will come, and at the trumpet blast down will go the loftiest ramparts of the cities that are ‘walled up to heaven,’ with a rush and a crash, and through the dust and over the ruined rubbish Christ’s soldiers will march and take possession. So trust in your Leader, and be sure of the victory, and have patience and keep on at your work.

Do not make Joshua’s mistake. ‘Art Thou for us?’—‘Nay! Thou art for *me*.’ That is a very different thing. We have the right to be sure that God is on our side, when we have made sure that we are on God’s. So take care of self-will and self-regard, and human passions, and all the other parasitical insects that creep round philanthropic religious work, lest they spoil your service. There is a great deal that calls itself after Jehu’s fashion, ‘My zeal for the Lord,’ which is nothing better than zeal for my own notions and their preponderance. Therefore we must strip ourselves of all that, and not fancy that the cause is ours, and then

graciously admit Christ to help us, but recognise that it is *His*, and lowly submit ourselves to His direction, and what we do, do, and when we fight, fight, in His name and for His sake.

III. Here is the Ally in all our warfare with ourselves.

That is the worst fight. Far worse than all these Hittites and Hivites, and the other tribes with their barbarous names, far worse than all external foes, are the foes that each man carries about in his own heart. In that slow hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot struggle I do not believe that there is any conquering power available for a man that can for a moment be compared with the power that comes through submission to Christ's command and acceptance of Christ's help. He has fought every foot of the ground before us. We have to 'run the race'—to take another metaphor—'that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,' the great Leader, and in His own self the Perfecter of the faith which conquers. In Him, His example, the actual communication of His divine Spirit, and in the motives for brave and persistent conflict which flow from His Cross and Passion, we shall find that which alone will make us the victors in this internecine warfare. There can be no better directory given to any man than to tread in Christ's footsteps, and learn how to fight, from Him who in the wilderness repelled the triple assault with the single 'It is written'; thus recognising the word and will of God as the only directory and defence.

Thus, brethren, if we humbly take service in His ranks, and ask Him to show us where our foes within are, and to give us the grace to grapple with them, and cast them out, anything is possible rather than ultimate defeat, and however long and sore the struggle may be, its length and its severity are precious parts of the dis-

cipline that makes us strong, and we shall at last be more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.

IV. Lastly, I see here the Power which it is madness to resist.

Think of this vision. Think of the deep truths, partially shadowed and symbolised by it. Think of Christ, what He is, and what resources He has at His back, of what are His claims for our service, and our loyal, militant obedience. Think of the certain victory of all who follow Him amongst 'the armies of Heaven, clad in fine linen, clean and white.' Think of the crown and the throne for him that 'overcomes.'

Remember the destructive powers that sleep in Him: the 'drawn sword in His hand,' the 'two-edged sword out of His mouth,' the 'wrath of the Lamb.' Think of the ultimate certain defeat of all antagonisms; of that last campaign when He goes forth with the 'name written on His vesture and on His thigh "King of kings and Lord of lords."' Think of how He 'strikes through kings in the day of His wrath, and fills the place with the bodies of the dead'; and how His 'enemies become His footstool.'

Ponder His own solemn word, 'He that is not with Me, is against Me.' There is no neutrality in this warfare. Either we are for Him or we are for His adversary. 'Under which King? speak or die!' As sensible men, not indifferent to your highest and lasting well-being, ask yourselves, 'Can I, with my ten thousand, meet Him with His twenty thousand?' Put yourselves under His orders, and He will be on your side. He will teach your hands to war, and your fingers to fight; will cover your heads in the day of battle, and bring you at last, palm-bearing and laurel-crowned, to that blissful state where there will still be service, and He

still be the 'Captain of the Lord's host,' but where 'swords will be beaten into ploughshares' and the victors shall need to 'learn war no more.'

THE SIEGE OF JERICHO

'And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, . . . until the day I bid you shout: then shall ye shout. 11. So the ark of the Lord compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.'—JOSHUA VI. 10, 11.

THE cheerful uniform obedience of Israel to Joshua stands in very remarkable contrast with their perpetual murmurings and rebellions under Moses. Many reasons probably concurred in bringing about this change of tone. For one thing the long period of suspense was over; and to average sense-bound people there is no greater trial of faith and submission than waiting, inactive, for something that is to come. Now they are face to face with their enemies, and it is a great deal easier to fight than to expect; and their courage mounts higher as dangers come nearer. Then there were great miracles which left their impression upon the people, such as the passage of the Jordan, and so on.

So that the Epistle to the Hebrews is right when it says, 'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days.' And that faith was as manifest in the six days' march round the city, as on the seventh day of victorious entrance. For, if you will read the narrative carefully, you will see that it says that the Israelites were not told what was to be the end of that apparently useless and aimless promenade. It was only on the morning of the day of the miracle that it was announced. So there

are two stages in this instance of faith. There is the protracted trial of it, in doing an apparently useless thing; and there is the victory, which explains and vindicates it. Let us look at these two points now.

I. Consider that strange protracted trial of faith.

The command comes to the people, through Joshua's lips, unaccompanied by any explanation or reasons. If Moses had called for a like obedience from the people in their wilderness mood, there would have been no end of grumbling. But whatever some of them may have thought, there is nothing recorded now but prompt submission. Notice, too, the order of the procession. First come the armed men, then seven white-robed priests, blowing, probably, discordant music upon their ram's horn trumpets; then the Ark, the symbol and token of God's presence; and then the rereward. So the *Ark* is the centre; and it is not only Israel that is marching round the city, but rather it is God who is circling the walls. Very impressive would be the grim silence of it all. Tramp, tramp, tramp, round and round, six days on end, without a word spoken (though no doubt taunts in plenty were being showered down from the walls), they marched, and went back to the camp, and subsided into inactivity for another four-and-twenty hours, until they 'turned out' for the procession once more.

Now, what did all that mean? The blast of the trumpet was, in the Jewish feasts, the solemn proclamation of the presence of God. And hence the purpose of that singular march circumambulating Jericho was to declare 'Here is the Lord of the whole earth, weaving His invisible cordon and network around the doomed city.' In fact the meaning of the procession, emphasised by the silence of the soldiers, was that

God Himself was saying, in the long-drawn blasts of the priestly trumpet, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.' Now, whatever Jericho and its people thought about that, Israel, according to the commentary of the New Testament, had to some extent, at all events, learnt the lesson, and knew, of course very rudimentarily and with a great deal of mere human passion mingled with it, but still knew, that this was God's summons, and the manifestation of God's presence. And so round the city they went, and day by day they did the thing in which their faith apprehended its true meaning, and which, by reason of their faith, they were willing to do. Let us take some lessons from that.

Here is a confidence in the divine presence, manifested by unquestioning obedience to a divine command.

'Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why.'

Joshua had spoken; God had spoken through him. And so here goes! up with the Ark and the trumpets, and out on to the hot sand for the march! It would have been a great deal easier to have stopped in the tents. It was disheartening work marching round thus. The sceptical spirit in the host—the folk of whom there are many great-grandchildren living to-day, who always have objections to urge when disagreeable duties are crammed up against their faces—would have enough to say on that occasion, but the bulk of the people were true, and obeyed. Now, we do not need to put out the eyes of our understanding in order to practise the obedience of faith. And we have to exercise common-sense about the things that seem to us to be duties.

But this is plain, that if once we see a thing to be, in Christian language, the will of our Father in heaven, then everything is settled; and there is only one course for us, and that is, unquestioning submission, active submission, or, what is as hard, passive submission.

Then here again is faith manifesting itself by an obedience which was altogether ignorant of what was coming. I think that is quite plain in the story, if you will read it carefully, though I think that it is not quite what people generally understand as its meaning. But it makes the incident more in accordance with God's uniform way of dealing with us that the host should be told on the morning of the first day of the week that they were to march round the city, and told the same on the second day, and on the third the same, and so on until the sixth; and that not until the morning of the seventh, were they told what was to be the end of it all. That is the way in which God generally deals with us. In the passage of the Jordan, too, you will find, if you will look at the narrative carefully, that although Joshua was told what was coming, the people were not told till the morning of the day, when the priests' feet were dipped in the brink of the water. We, too, have to do our day's march, knowing very little about to-morrow; and we have to carry on all through life 'doing the duty that lies nearest us,' entirely ignorant of the strange issues to which it may conduct. Life is like a voyage down some winding stream, shut in by hills, sometimes sunny and vine-clad, like the Rhine, sometimes grim and black, like an American cañon. As the traveller looks ahead he wonders how the stream will find a passage beyond the next bend; and as he looks back, he cannot trace the course by which he has come. It is only when he rounds the last

shoulder that he sees a narrow opening flashing in the sunshine, and making a way for his keel. So, seeing that we know nothing about the issues, let us make sure of the motives; and seeing that we do not know what to-morrow may bring forth, nor even what the next moment may bring, let us see that we fill the present instant as full as it will hold with active obedience to God, based upon simple faith in Him. He does not open His whole hand at once; He opens a finger at a time, as you do sometimes with your children when you are trying to coax them to take something out of the palm. He gives us enough light for the moment. He says, 'March round Jericho; and be sure that I mean something. What I do mean I will tell you some day.' And so we have to put all into His hands.

Then here, again, is faith manifesting itself by persistency. A week was not long, but it was a long while during which to do that one apparently useless thing and nothing else. It would take about an hour or so to march round the city, and there were twenty-three hours of idleness. Little progress in reducing Jericho was made by the progress round it, and it must have got rather wearisome about the sixth day. Familiarity would breed monotony, but notwithstanding the deadly influences of habit, the obedient host turned out for their daily round. 'Let us not be weary in well-doing,' for there is a time for everything. There is a time for sowing and for reaping, and in the season of the reaping 'we shall reap, if we faint not.' Dear brethren! we all get weary of our work. Custom presses upon us, 'with a weight heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.' It is easy to do things with a spurt, but it is the keeping on at the monotonous, trivial, and sometimes

unintelligible duties that is the test of a man's grit, and of his goodness too. So, although it is a very, very threadbare lesson—one that you may think it was not worth while for me to bring you all here to receive—I am sure that there are few things needed more by us all, and especially by those of us who are on the wrong side of middle life, as people call it—though I think it is the right side in many respects—than that old familiar lesson. Keep on as you have begun, and for the six weary days turn out, however hot the sun, however comfortable the carpets in the tent, however burning the sand, however wearisome and flat it may seem to be perpetually tramping round the same walls of the same old city; keep on, for in due season the trumpet will sound and the walls will fall.

II. So that brings me to the second stage—viz., the sudden victory which vindicates and explains the protracted trial of faith.

I do not need to tell the story of how, on the seventh day, the host encompassed the city seven times, and at last they were allowed to break the long silence with a shout. You will observe the prominence given to the sacred seven, both in the number of days, of circuits made, and the number of the priests' trumpets. Probably the last day was a Sabbath, for there must have been one somewhere in the week, and it is improbable that it was one of the undistinguished days. That *was* a shout, we may be sure, by which the week's silence was avenged, and all the repressed emotions gained utterance at last. The fierce yell from many throats, which startled the wild creatures in the hills behind Jericho, blended discordantly with the trumpets' clang which proclaimed a present God; and at His summons the fortifications toppled into hideous ruin, and over

the fallen stones the men of Israel clambered, each soldier, in all that terrible circle of avengers that surrounded the doomed city, marching straight forward, and so all converging on the centre.

Now, we can discover good reasons for this first incident in the campaign being marked by miracle. The fact that it was the first is a reason. It is a law of God's progressive revelation that each new epoch is inaugurated by miraculous works which do not continue throughout its course. For instance, it is observable that, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the first example of each class of incidents recorded there, such as the first preaching, the first persecution, the first martyrdom, the first expansion of the Gospel beyond Jews, its first entrance into Europe, has usually the stamp of miracle impressed on it, and is narrated at great length, while subsequent events of the same class have neither of these marks of distinction. Take, for example, the account of Stephen, the first martyr. He saw 'the heavens opened' and the Son of Man 'standing at the right hand of God.' We do not read that the heavens opened when Herod struck off the head of James with the sword. But was Jesus any the less near to help His servant? Certainly not.

In like manner it was fitting that the first time that Israel crossed swords with these deadly and dreaded enemies should be marked by a miraculous intervention to hearten God's warriors. But let us take care that we understand the teaching of any miracle. Surely it does not secularise and degrade the other incidents of a similar sort in which no miracle was experienced. The very opposite lesson is the true one to draw from a miracle. In its form it is extraordinary, and presents God's direct action on men or on nature, so obviously

that all eyes can see it. But the conclusion to be drawn is not that God acts only in a 'supernatural' manner, but that He is acting as really, though in a less obvious fashion, in the 'natural' order. In these turning-points, the inauguration of new stages in revelation or history, the cause which always produces all nearer effects and the ultimate effects, which are usually separated or united (as one may choose to regard it) by many intervening links, are brought together. But the originating power works as truly when it is transmitted through these many links as when it dispenses with them. Miracle shows us in abbreviated fashion, and therefore conspicuously, the divine will acting directly, that we may see it working when it acts indirectly. In miracle God 'makes bare His arm,' that we may be sure of its operation when it is draped and partially hid, as by a vesture, by second causes.

We are not to argue that, because there is no miracle, God is not present or active. He was as truly with Israel when there was no Ark present, and no blast of the trumpet heard. He was as truly with Israel when they fought apparently unhelped, as He was when Jericho fell. The teaching of all the miracles in the Old and the New Testaments is that the order of the universe is maintained by the continual action of the will of God on men and things. So this story is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. God is as much with you and me in our fights as He was with the Israelites when they marched round Jericho, and as certainly will He help. If by faith we endure the days of often blind obedience, we shall share the rapture of the sudden victory.

Now, I have said that the last day of this incident was probably a Sabbath day. Does not that suggest

the thought that we may take this story as a prophetic symbol? There is for us a week of work, and a seventh day of victory, when we shall enter, not into the city of confusion which has come to nought, but into the city which 'hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' The old fathers of the Christian Church were not far wrong, when they saw in this story a type of the final coming of the Lord. Did you ever notice how St. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians about that coming, seems to have his mind turned back to the incident before us? Remember that in this incident the two things which signalled the fall of the city were the trumpet and the shout. What does Paul say? 'The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a *shout*, with the voice of the archangel, and with the *trump* of God.' Jericho over again! And then, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen!' 'And I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband.'

RAHAB

'And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive . . . and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day.'—JOSHUA vi. 25.

THIS story comes in like an oasis in these terrible narratives of Canaanite extermination. There is much about it that is beautiful and striking, but the main thing is that it teaches the universality of God's mercy, and the great truth that trust in Him unites to Him and brings deliverance, how black soever may have been the previous life.

I need not tell over again the story, told with such inimitable picturesqueness here: how the two spies, swimming the Jordan in flood, set out on their dangerous

mission and found themselves in the house of Rahab, a harlot; how the king sent to capture them, how she hid them among the flax-stalks bleaching on the flat roof, confessed faith in Israel's God and lied steadfastly to save them, how they escaped to the Quarantania hills, how she 'perished not' in the capture, entered into the community of Israel, was married, and took her place—hers!—in the line of David's and Christ's ancestresses.

The point of interest is her being, notwithstanding her previous position and history, one of the few instances in which heathen were brought into Israel. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* and *James* both refer to her. We now consider her story as embodying for us some important truths about faith in its nature, its origin, its power.

I. Faith in its constant essence and its varying objects.

Her creed was very short and simple. She abjured idols, and believed that Jehovah was the one God. She knew nothing of even the Mosaic revelation, nothing of its moral law or of its sacrifices. And yet the *Epistle to the Hebrews* has no scruple in ascribing faith to her. The object of that Epistle is to show that Christianity is Judaism perfected. It labours to establish that objectively there has been advance, not contradiction, and that subjectively there is absolute identity. It has always been faith that has bound men to God. That faith may co-exist with very different degrees of illumination. Not the creed, but the trust, is the all-important matter. This applies to all pre-Christian times and to all heathen lands. *Our* faith has a fuller gospel to lay hold of. Do not neglect it.

Beware lest people with less light and more love get

in before you, 'who shall come from the east and the west.'

II. Faith in its origin in fear.

There are many roads to faith, and it matters little which we take, so long as we get to the goal. This is one, and some people seem to think that it is a very low and unworthy one, and one which we should never urge upon men. But there are a side of the divine nature and a mode of the divine government which properly evoke fear.

God's moral government, His justice and retribution, are facts.

Fear is an inevitable and natural consequence of feeling that His justice is antagonistic to us. The work of conscience is precisely to create such fear. Not to feel it is to fall below manhood or to be hardened by sin.

That fear is meant to lead us to God and love. Rahab fled to God. Peter 'girt his fisher's coat to him,' and lost his fear in the sunshine of Christ's face, as a rainbow trembles out of a thunder-cloud when touched by sunbeams.

We have all grounds enough to *fear*.

Urge these as a reason for *trust*.

III. Faith in its relation to the previous life.

It is a strange instance of blindness that attempts have been made to soften down the Bible's plain speaking about Rahab's character.

In her story we have an anticipation of New Testament teaching.

The 'woman that was a sinner.'

Mary Magdalene.

'Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.'

She shows us that there is no hopeless guilt. None

is so in regard to the effects of sin on a soul. There is no heart so indurated as that its capacity for being stirred by the divine message is killed.

There is none hopeless in regard to God.

His love embraces all, however bad. The bond which unites to Him is not blamelessness of life but simple trust.

The grossest vice is not so thorough a barrier as self-satisfied self-righteousness.

A thin slice of crystal will bar the entrance of air more effectually than many folds of stuff.

IV. Faith in its practical effects.

Rahab's story shows how living faith, like a living stream, will cut a channel for itself, and must needs flow out into the life.

Hence James is right in using her as an example of how 'we are justified by works and not by faith only,' and the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is equally right in enrolling her in his great muster-roll of heroes and heroines of faith, and asserting that 'by faith' she 'perished not among them who believed not.' The one writer fastens on a later stage in her experience than does the other. James points to the rich fruit, the *Epistle to the Hebrews* goes deeper and lays bare the root from which the life rose to the clusters.

The faith that saves is not a barren intellectual process, nor an idle trust in Christ's salvation, but a practical power. If genuine it *will* mould and impel the life.

So Rahab's faith led her, as ours, if real, will lead us, to break with old habits and associations contrary to itself. She ceased to be 'Rahab the harlot,' she forsook 'her own people and her father's house.' But her con-

quest of her old self was gradual. A lie was a strange kind of first-fruits of faith. Its true fruit takes time to flower and swell and come to ripeness and sweetness.

So we should not expect old heads on young shoulders, nor wonder if people, lifted from the dunghills of the world, have some stench and rags of their old vices hanging about them still. That thought should moderate our expectations of the characters of converts from heathenism, or from the degraded classes at home. And it should be present to ourselves, when we find in ourselves sad recurrences of faults and sins that we know should have been cast out, and that we hoped had been so.

This thought enhances our wondering gratitude for the divine long-suffering which bears with our slow progress. Our great Teacher never loses patience with His dull scholars.

V. Faith as the means of deliverance and safety.

From external evils it delivers us or not, as God may will. James was no less dear, and no less faithful, than John, though he was early 'slain with the sword,' and his brother died in extreme old age in Ephesus. Paul looked forward to being 'delivered from every evil work,' though he knew that the time of his being 'offered' was at hand, because the deliverance that he looked for was his being 'saved *into* His heavenly kingdom.'

That true deliverance is infallibly ours, if by faith we have made the Deliverer ours.

There is a more terrible fall of a worse city than Jericho, in that day when 'the city of the terrible ones shall be laid low,' and *our* Joshua brings it 'to the ground, even to the dust.' 'In that same day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: we have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks,'

and into that eternal home He will certainly lead all who are joined to Him, and separated from their foul old selves, and from 'the city of destruction,' by faith in Him.

ACHAN'S SIN, ISRAEL'S DEFEAT

'But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. 2. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. 3. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. 4. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. 5. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down; wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. 6. And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. 7. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! 8. O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9. For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name? 10. And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11. Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. 12. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed; neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.'—
JOSHUA vii. 1-12.

THIS passage naturally parts itself into—1. The hidden sin (v. 1); 2. The repulse by which it is punished (vs. 2-5); 3. The prayer of remonstrance (vs. 6-9); and 4. The answer revealing the cause (vs. 10-12). We may briefly note the salient points in these four divisions, and then consider the general lessons of the whole.

I. Observe, then, that the sin is laid at the doors of the whole nation, while yet it was the secret act of one

man. That is a strange 'for' in verse 1—the people did it; 'for' Achan did it. Observe, too, with what bitter particularity his descent is counted back through three generations, as if to diffuse the shame and guilt over a wide area, and to blacken the ancestors of the culprit. Note also the description of the sin. Its details are not given, but its inmost nature is. The specification of the 'Babylonish garment,' the 'shekels of silver,' and the 'wedge of gold,' is reserved for the sinner's own confession; but the blackness of the deed is set forth in its principle in verse 1. It was a 'breach of trust,' for so the phrase 'committed a trespass' might be rendered. The expression is frequent in the Pentateuch to describe Israel's treacherous departure from God, and has this full meaning here. The sphere in which Achan's treason was evidenced was 'in the devoted thing.' The spoil of Jericho was set aside for Jehovah, and to appropriate any part of it was sacrilege. His sin, then, was double, being at once covetousness and robbing God. Achan, at the beginning of Israel's warfare for Canaan, and Ananias, at the beginning of the Church's conquest of the world, are brothers alike in guilt and in doom. Note the wide sweep of 'the anger of the Lord,' involving in its range not only the one transgressor, but the whole people.

II. All unconscious of the sin, and flushed with victory, Joshua let no grass grow under his feet, but was prepared to push his advantage to the utmost with soldierly promptitude. The commander's faith and courage were contagious, and the spies came back from their perilous reconnaissance of Ai with the advice that a small detachment was enough for its reduction. They had not spied the mound in the middle of Achan's tent, or their note would have been

changed. Three thousand, or three hundred, would have been enough, if God had been with them. The whole army would not have been enough since He was not. The site of Ai seems to have been satisfactorily identified on a small plateau among the intricate network of wild wadys and bare hills that rise behind Jericho. The valley to the north, the place where the ambush lay at the successful assault, and a great mound, still bearing the name 'Et Tel' (the heap), are all there. The attacking force does not seem to have been commanded by Joshua. The ark stayed at Gilgal. The contempt for the resistance likely to be met makes the panic which ensued the more remarkable. What turned the hearts of the confident assailants to water? There was no serious fighting, or the slaughter would have been more than thirty-six. 'There went up . . . about three thousand and they'—did what? fought and conquered? Alas, no, but 'they fled before the men of Ai,' rushing in wild terror down the steep pass which they had so confidently breasted in the morning, till the pursuers caught them up at some 'quarries,' where, perhaps, the ground was difficult, and there slew the few who fell, while the remainder got away by swiftness of foot, and brought back their terror and their shame to the camp. As the disordered fugitives poured in, they infected the whole with their panic. Such unwieldy undisciplined hosts are peculiarly liable to such contagious terror, and we find many instances in Scripture and elsewhere of the utter disorganisation which ensues. The whole conquest hung in the balance. A little more and the army would be a mob; and the mob would break into twos and threes, which would get short shrift from the Amorites.

III. Mark, then, Joshua's action in the crisis. He does not try to encourage the people, but turns from them to God. The spectacle of the leader and the elders prone before the ark, with rent garments and dust-bestrewn hair, in sign of mourning, would not be likely to hearten the alarmed people; but the defeat had clearly shown that something had disturbed the relation to God, and the first necessity was to know what it was. Joshua's prayer is perplexed, and not free from a wistful, backward look, nor from regard to his own reputation; but the soul of it is an earnest desire to know the 'wherefore' of this disaster. It traces the defeat to God, and means really, 'Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me.' No doubt it runs perilously near to repeating the old complaints at Kadesh and elsewhere, which are almost verbally reproduced in its first words. But the same things said by different people are not the same; and Joshua's question is the voice of a faith struggling to find footing, and his backward look is not because he doubts God's power to help, or hankers after Egypt, but because he sees that, for some unknown reason, they have lost the divine protection. His reference to himself betrays the crushing weight of responsibility which he felt, and comes not from carefulness for his own good fame so much as from his dread of being unable to vindicate himself, if the people should turn on him as the author of their misfortunes. His fear of the news of the check at Ai emboldening not only the neighbouring Amorites (highlanders) of the western Palestine, but the remoter Canaanites (lowlanders) of the coast, to make a combined attack, and sweep Israel out of existence, was a perfectly reasonable forecast of what would follow. The naïve simplicity of the appeal to God, 'What wilt

Thou do for Thy great name?' becomes the soldier, whose words went the shortest way to their aim, as his spear did. We cannot fancy this prayer coming from Moses; but, for all that, it has the ring of faith in it, and beneath its blunt, simple words throbs a true heart.

IV. The answer sounds strange at first. God almost rebukes him for praying. He gives Joshua back his own 'wherefore' in the question that sounds so harsh, 'Wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face?' but the harshness is only apparent, and serves to point the lesson that follows, that the cause of the disaster is with Israel, not with God, and that therefore the remedy is not in prayer, but in active steps to cast out 'the unclean thing.' The prayer had asked two things,—the disclosure of the cause of God's having left them, and His return. The answer lays bare the cause, and therein shows the conditions of His return. Note the indignant accumulation of verbs in verse 11, describing the sin in all its aspects. The first three of the six point out its heinousness in reference to God, as sin, as a breach of covenant, and as an appropriation of what was specially His. The second three describe it in terms of ordinary morality, as theft, lying, and concealment; so many black sides has one sin when God's eye scrutinises it. Note, too, the attribution of the sin to the whole people, the emphatic reduplication of the shameful picture of their defeat, the singular transference to them of the properties of 'the devoted thing' which Achan has taken, and the plain, stringent conditions of God's return. Joshua's prayer is answered. He knows now why little Ai has beaten them back. He asked, 'What shall I say?' He has got something of grave import to say. So far this passage carries us,

leaving the pitiful last hour of the wretched troubler of Israel untouched. What lessons are taught here?

First, God's soldiers must be pure. The conditions of God's help are the same to-day as when that panic-stricken crowd ignominiously fled down the rocky pass, foiled before an insignificant fortress, because sin clave to them, and God was gone from them. The age of miracles may have ceased, but the law of the divine intervention which governed the miracles has not ceased. It is true to-day, and will always be true, that the victories of the Church are won by its holiness far more than by any gifts or powers of mind, culture, wealth, eloquence, or the like. Its conquests are the conquests of an indwelling God, and He cannot share His temples with idols. When God is with us, Jericho is not too strong to be captured; when He is driven from us by our own sin, Ai is not too weak to defeat us. A shattered wall keeps us out, if we fight in our own strength. Fortifications that reach to heaven fall flat before us when God is at our side. If Christian effort seems ever fruitless, the first thing to do is to look for the 'Babylonish garment' and the glittering shekels hidden in our tents. Nine times out of ten we shall find the cause in our own spiritual deficiencies. Our success depends on God's presence, and God's presence depends on our keeping His dwelling-place holy. When the Church is 'fair as the moon,' reflecting in silvery whiteness the ardours of the sun which gives her all her light, and without such spots as dim the moon's brightness, she will be 'terrible as an army with banners.' This page of Old Testament history has a living application to the many efforts and few victories of the churches of to-day, which seem scarce able to hold their own amid the natural increase of population in

so-called Christian lands, and are so often apparently repulsed when they go up to attack the outlying heathenism.

‘His strength was as the strength of ten,
Because his heart was pure,’

is true of the Christian soldier.

Again, we learn the power of one man to infect a whole community and to inflict disaster on it. One sick sheep taints a flock. The effects of the individual's sin are not confined to the doer. We have got a fine new modern word to express this solemn law, and we talk now of ‘solidarity,’ which sounds very learned and ‘advanced.’ But it means just what we see in this story; Achan was the sinner, all Israel suffered. We are knit together by a mystical but real bond, so that ‘no man,’ be he good or bad, ‘liveth to himself,’ and no man's sin terminates in himself. We see the working of that unity in families, communities, churches, nations. Men are not merely aggregated together like a pile of cannon balls, but are knit together like the myriad lives in a coral rock. Put a drop of poison anywhere, and it runs by a thousand branching veins through the mass, and tints and taints it all. No man can tell how far the blight of his secret sins may reach, nor how wide the blessing of his modest goodness may extend. We should seek to cultivate the sense of being members of a great whole, and to ponder our individual responsibility for the moral and religious health of the church, the city, the nation. We are not without danger from an exaggerated individualism, and we need to realise more constantly and strongly that we are but threads in a great network, endowed with mysterious vitality and power of transmitting electric impulses, both of good and evil.

Again, we have one more illustration in this story of the well-worn lesson,—never too threadbare to be repeated, until it is habitually realised,—that God's eye sees the hidden sins. Nobody saw Achan carry the spoil to his tent, or dig the hole to hide it. His friends walked across the floor without suspicion of what was beneath. No doubt, he held his place in his tribe as an honourable man, and his conscience traced no connection between that recently disturbed patch on the floor and the helter-skelter flight from Ai; but when the lot began to be cast, he would have his own thought, and when the tribe of Judah was taken, some creeping fear would begin to coil round his heart, which tightened its folds, and hissed more loudly, as each step in the lot brought discovery nearer home; and when, at last, his own name fell from the vase, how terribly the thought would glare in on him,—‘And God knew it all the while, and I fancied I had covered it all up so safely.’ It is an awful thing to hear the bloodhounds following up the scent which leads them straight to our lurking-place. God's judgments may be long in being put on our tracks, but, once loose, they are sure of scent, and cannot be baffled. It is an old, old thought, ‘Thou God seest me’; but kept well in mind, it would save from many a sin, and make sunshine in many a shady place.

Again, we have in Achan a lesson which the professing Christians of great commercial nations, like England, sorely need. I have already pointed out the singular parallel between him and Ananias and Sapphira. Covetousness was the sin of all three. It is the sin of the Church to-day. The whole atmosphere in which some of us live is charged with the subtle poison of it. Men are estimated by their wealth. The

great aim of life is to get money, or to keep it, or to gain influence and notoriety by spending it. Did anybody ever hear of church discipline being exercised on men who committed Achan's sin? *He* was stoned to death, but we set *our* Achans in high places in the Church. Perhaps if we went and fell on our faces before the ark when we are beaten, we should be directed to some tent where a very 'influential member' of Israel lived, and should find that to put an end to his ecclesiastical life had a wonderful effect in bringing back courage to the army, and leading to more unmingled dependence on God. Covetousness was stoned to death in Israel, and struck with sudden destruction in the Apostolic Church. It has been reserved for the modern Church to tolerate and almost to canonise it; and yet we wonder how it comes that we are so often foiled before some little Ai, and so seldom see any walls falling by our assault. Let us listen to that stern sentence, 'I will not be with you any more, except ye destroy the devoted thing from among you.'

THE SUN STAYED

'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.'—JOSHUA x. 12.

'THE last time,' what a sad sound that has! In all minds there is a shrinking from the last time of doing even some common act. The walk down a street that we have passed every day for twenty years, and never cared in the least about, and the very doorsteps and the children in the streets, have an interest for us, as pensively we leave the commonplace familiar scene.

On this last Sunday of another year, there comes a

tone of sober meditation over us, as we think that it is the last. I would fain let the hour preach. I have little to say but to give voice to its lessons.

My text is only taken as a starting-point, and I shall say nothing about Joshua and his prayer. I do not discuss whether this was a miracle or not. It seems, at any rate, to be taken by the writer of the story as one. What a picture he draws of the fugitives rushing down the rocky pass, blind in their fear, behind them the flushed and eager conqueror, the burst of the sudden tempest and far in the west the crescent moon, the leader on the hilltop with his prayer for but one hour or two more of daylight to finish the wild work so well begun! And, says the story, his wish was granted, and no day has been 'like it before or since, in which the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man.' Once, and only once, did time seem to stand still; from the beginning till now it has been going steadily on, and even then it only seemed to stand. That day seemed longer, but life was passing all the same.

And so the first thought forced upon us here by our narrative and by the season is the old one, so commonplace and yet so solemn.

I. Life inexorably slides away from us.

Once, and only once, it seemed to pause. How often since has Joshua's prayer been prayed again! By the fearful,—the wretch to be hanged at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, the man whom the next train will part from all he loves. By the hopeful,—the child wearying for the holidays, the bridegroom,

'Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds!'

By the suffering,—

'Would God it were evening!'

By the martyr amid the flames,

‘Come quickly, Lord Jesus!’

But all in vain. We cannot expand the moments to hours, nor compress the hours to moments. Leaden or winged, the hours are hours. The cold-blooded pendulum ticks on, equable and unaltered, and after sixty minutes, no sooner and no later, the hour strikes. ‘There is a time for every purpose.’

How solemn is the thought of that constant process! It goes on for ever, like the sea fog creeping up from the wide ocean and burying life and sunshine in its fatal folds, or like the ever-flowing river, or like the fall plunging over the edge of the cliff, or like the motions of the midnight sky. Each moment in its turn passes into the colourless stony past, and the shadow creeps up the hillside.

And how unnoticed it is! We only know motion by the jolts. The revolution of the earth and its rush along its orbit are unfelt by us. We are constantly startled to feel how long ago such and such a thing took place. The mother sees her little girl at her knee, and in a few days, as it seems, finds her a woman. How immense is our life in the prospect, how awfully it collapses in the retrospect! Only by seeing constellation after constellation set, do we know that the heavens are in motion. We have need of an effort of serious reflection to realise that it is of *us* and of *our* lives that all these old commonplaces are true.

That constant, unnoticed progress has an end. Our life is a definite period, having a bounded past behind it, a present, and a bounded future before it. We have a sandglass and it runs out. We are like men sliding

down a rope or hauling a boat towards a fixed point. The sea is washing away our sandy island, and is creeping nearer and nearer to where we stand, and will wash over us soon. No cries, nor prayers, nor wishes will avail. It is vain for *us* to say, 'Sun! stand thou still!'

II. Therefore our chief care should be to finish our work in our day.

Joshua had his day lengthened; we can come to the same result by crowding ours with service. What is the purpose of life? Is it a shop? or a garden? a school? No. Our 'chief end' is to become like God and a little to help forward His cause. All is intended to develop character; all life is disciplinary.

God's purpose should be our desire. That desire should mould all our thoughts and acts. There should be no mere sentimental regrets for the past, but the spirit of consecration should affect our thoughts about it. There should be penitence, thankfulness, not vain mourning over what is gone. There should be no waste or selfish use of the present. What is it given us for but to use for God?

Strenuous work is the true way to lengthen each day. Time is infinitely elastic. The noblest work is to do 'the works of Him that sent me.' There should be no care for the future. It is in His hand. There will be room in it for doing all His will.

'Lord, it belongs not to my care,
Whether I die or live.'

III. If so, the passing day will have results that never pass.

Joshua's day was long enough for his work, and that work was a victory which told on future generations.

So life, short as it is, will be long enough for all that we have to do and learn and be.

Christ's servant is immortal till his work is done.

God gives every man time enough for his salvation.

What may we bring out of life? Character, Christ-likeness, thankful memories, union with God, capacity for heaven. The transient leaves the abiding. The flood foams itself away, but deposits rich soil on the plain.

IV. Thus the passing away of what must pass may become a joy.

Why should we be sad? There are reasons enough, as many sad, lonely hearts among us know too well. To some men dark thoughts of death and judgment make the crumbling away of life too gloomy a fact to be contemplated, but it may and should be calm joy to us that the weary world ends and a blessed life begins. We may count the moments and see them pass, as a bride watches the hours rolling on to her marriage morning; not, indeed, without tremor and sadness at leaving her old home, but yet with meek hope and gentle joy.

It is possible for men to see that life is but 'as a shadow that declineth,' and yet to be glad. By faith in Christ, united to 'Him Who is for ever and ever,' our souls shall 'triumph over death and thee, O time.'

We need not cry, 'Sun! stand still!' but rather, 'Come quickly, Lord Jesus!'

Then Time shall be 'the lackey to eternity,' and Death be the porter of heaven's gate, and we shall pass from the land of setting suns and waning moons and change and sorrow, to that land where 'thy sun shall no more go down,' and 'there shall be no more time.'

UNWON BUT CLAIMED

'There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed, . . . them will I drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide thou it by lot unto Israel for an inheritance.'—JOSHUA xiii. 1-6.

JOSHUA was now a very old man and had occupied seven years in the conquest. His work was over, and now he had only to take steps to secure the completion by others of the triumph which he would never see. This incident has many applications to the work of the Church in the world, but not less important ones to individual progress, and we consider these mainly now.

I. The clear recognition of present imperfection.

That is essential in all regions. 'Not as though'; the higher up, the more clearly we see the summit. The ideal grows loftier, as partially realised. The mountain seems comparatively low and easy till we begin to climb. We should be continually driven by a sense of our incompleteness, and drawn by the fair vision of unattained possibilities. In all regions, to be satisfied with the attained is to cease to grow.

This is eminently so in the Christian life, with its goal of absolute completeness.

How blessed this dissatisfaction is! It keeps life fresh: it is the secret of perpetual youth.

Joshua's work was incomplete, as every man's must be. We each have our limitations, the defects of our qualities, the barriers of our environment, the brevity of our day of toil, and we have to be content to carry the fiery cross a little way and then to give it up to other hands. There is only One who could say, 'It is done.' Let us see that we do our own fragment.

II. The confident reckoning on complete possession.

Joshua's conquest was very partial. He subdued part of the central mountain nucleus, but the low-lying stretch of country on the coast, Philistia and the maritime plain up to Tyre and Sidon and other outlying districts, remained unsubdued. Yet the whole land was now to be allotted out to the tribes. That allotment must have strengthened faith in their ultimate possession, and encouraged effort to make the ideal a reality, and to appropriate as their own in fact what was already theirs in God's purpose. So a great part of Christian duty, and a great secret of Christian progress, is to familiarise ourselves with the hope of complete victory. We should acquire the habit of contemplating as certainly meant by God to be ours, complete conformity to Christ's character, complete appropriation of Christ's gifts. God bade Jeremiah buy a 'field that was in Anathoth' at the time an invading army held the land. A Roman paid down money for the ground on which the besiegers of Rome were encamped. It does not become Christians to be less confident of victory. But we have to take heed that our confidence is grounded on the right foundation. God's commandment to Joshua to allot the land, even while the formidable foes enumerated in the context held it firmly, was based on the assurance (verse 6): 'Them will I drive out before the children of Israel.' Confidence based on self is presumption, and will end in defeat; confidence based on God will brace to noble effort, which is all the more vigorous and will surely lead to victory, because it distrusts self.

III. The vigorous effort animated by both the preceding.

How the habit of thinking the unconquered land

theirs would encourage Israel. Efforts without hope are feeble; hope without effort is fallacious.

Israel's history is significant. The land was never actually all conquered. God's promises are all conditional, and if we do not work, or if we work in any other spirit than in faith, we shall not win our allotted part in the 'inheritance of the saints in light.' It is possible to lose 'thy crown.' 'Work out your own salvation.' 'Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land.'

CALEB—A GREEN OLD AGE

'And Caleb . . . said unto him (Joshua), Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea.'—
JOSHUA xiv. 6.

FIVE and forty years had passed since the Lord had 'said this thing.' It was the promise to these two, now old men, of the prolongation of their lives, and to Caleb of his inheritance in the land. Seven years of fighting have been got through, and the preparations are being made for the division of the land by lot. But, before that is done, it is fitting that Caleb, whose portion had been specially secured to him by that old promise, should have the promise specially recognised and endorsed by the action of the leader, and independent of the operation of the lot. So he appears before Joshua, accompanied by the head men of his tribe, whose presence expresses their official consent to the exceptional treatment of their tribesman, and urges his request in a little speech, full of pathos and beauty and unconscious portraiture of the speaker. I take it as a picture of an ideal old age, showing in an actual

instance how happy, vigorous, full of buoyant energy and undiminished appetite for enterprise a devout old age may be. And my purpose now is not merely to comment on the few words of our text, but upon the whole of what falls from the lips of Caleb here.

I. I see then here, first, a life all built upon God's promise.

Five times in the course of his short plea with Joshua does he use the expression 'the Lord spake.' On the first occasion of the five he unites Joshua with himself as a recipient of the promise, 'Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said concerning me and thee.' But in the other four he takes it all to himself; not because it concerned him only, but because his confidence, laying hold of the promise, forgot his brother in the earnestness of his personal appropriation of it. And so, whatsoever general words God speaks to the world, a true believer will make them his very own; and when Christ says, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish,' faith translates it into 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' This is the first characteristic of a life built upon the promise of God, that it lays its hand upon that promise and claims it all for its very own.

Then notice, still further, how for all these forty-five years Caleb had 'hid the word in his heart,' had lived upon it and thought about it and believed it, and recognised the partial fulfilment of it, and cherished the secret fire unknown to any besides. And now at last, after so long an interval, he comes forward and stretches out a hand, unweakened by the long delay, to claim the perfect fulfilment at the end of his days. So 'the vision may tarry,' but a life based upon God's

promise has another estimate of swiftness and slowness than is current amongst men who have only the years of earthly life to reckon by; and that which to sense seems a long, weary delay, to faith seems but as 'a watch in the night.' The world, which only measures time by its own revolutions, has to lament over what seem to the sufferers long years of pains and tears, but in the calendar of faith 'weeping endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning.' The weary days dwindle into a point when they are looked at with an eye that has been accustomed to gaze on the solemn eternities of a promising and a faithful God. To it, as to Him, 'a thousand years are as one day'; and 'one day,' in the possibilities of divine favour and spiritual growth which it may enfold, 'as a thousand years.' To the men who measure time as God measures it, His help, howsoever long it may tarry, ever comes 'right early.'

Further, note how this life, built upon faith in the divine promise, was nourished and nurtured by instalments of fulfilment all along the road. Two promises were given to Caleb—one, that his life should be prolonged, and the other, that he should possess the territory into which he had so bravely ventured. The daily fulfilment of the one fed the fire of his faith in the ultimate accomplishment of the other, and he gratefully recounts it now, as part of his plea with Joshua—'Now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive as He spake, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses. And now, lo! I am this day fourscore and five years old.'

Whosoever builds his life on the promise of God has in the present the guarantee of the better future. As we are journeying onwards to that great fountain-head of all sweetness and felicity, there are ever

trickling brooks from it by the way, at which we may refresh our thirsty lips and invigorate our fainting strength. The present instalment carries with it the pledge of the full discharge of the obligation, and he whose heart and hope is fixed with a forward look on the divine inheritance, may, as he looks backward over all the years, see clearly in them one unbroken mass of preserving providences, and thankfully say, 'The Lord hath kept me alive, as He spake.'

And, still further, the life that is built upon faith like this man's, is a life of buoyant hopefulness till the very end. The hopes of age are few and tremulous. When the feast is nearly over, and the appetite is dulled, there is little more to be done, but to push back our chairs and go away. But God keeps 'the good wine' until the last. And when all earthly hopes are beginning to wear thin and to burn dim, then the great hope of 'the mountain of the inheritance' will rise brighter and clearer upon our horizon. It is something to have a hope so far in front of us that we never get up to it, to find it either less than our expectations or more than our desires; and this is not the least of the blessednesses of the living 'hope that maketh not ashamed,' that it lies before us till the very end, and beckons and draws us across the gulf of darkness. 'The Lord hath kept me alive, as He said; now give me this mountain whereof the Lord spake.'

II. Further, I see here a life that bears to be looked back at.

Caleb becomes almost garrulous in telling over the old story of that never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Joshua stood alone and tried to put some heart into the cowardly mob before them. There is no mock modesty about the man. He says that, amidst many

temptations to be untrue, he gave his report with sincerity and veracity, 'speaking as it was in mine heart,' and then he quotes twice, with a permissible satisfaction, the eulogium that had come upon him from the divine lips, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God.' The private soldier's cheek may well flush and his eye glitter as he repeats over again his general's praise. And for Caleb, half a century has not dimmed the impression that was made on his heart when he received that praise, through the lips of Moses, from God.

Now, of course, such a tone of speaking about one's past savours of an earlier stage in revelation than that in which we live, and, if this were to be taken as a man's total account of his whole life, we could not free it from the charge of unpleasing self-complacency and self-righteousness. But for all that, it is not the same thing in the retrospect whether you and I have to look back upon years that have been given to self, and the world, and passion, and pride, and covetousness, and frivolities and trifles of all sorts, or upon years that in the main, and regard being had to their deepest desires and governing direction, have been given to God and to His service. Many a man looking back upon his life—I wonder if there are any such men listening to me now—can only see such a sight as Abraham did on that morning when he looked down on the plain of Sodom, and 'Lo! the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.' Dear friends! the only thing that makes life in the retrospect tolerable is that it shall have been given to God, and that we can say, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God.'

III. Again, I see here a life which has discovered the secret of perpetual youth.

‘I,’ says the old man—‘am as strong this day as I was in the day when Moses sent me. As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in.’ For fighting, and for all the intercourse and manifold activities of life, his sinews are as braced, his eyes as clear, his spirit and limbs as alert as they were in those old days. No doubt you will say that was due to miraculous intervention. No doubt it was; but is it not true that, in a very real sense, a man may keep himself young all his life, if he will go the right way to work? And the secret of perpetual youthfulness lies here, in giving our hearts to God and in living for Him. Christianity, with its self-restraint and its exhortations to all, and especially to the young, to be chaste and temperate and to subdue the animal passions, has a direct tendency to conserve physical vigour; and Christianity, by the inspiration that it imparts, the stimulus that it gives, and the hopes that it permits us to cherish, has a direct tendency to keep alive in old age all the best of the characteristics of youth. Its buoyancy, its undimmed interest, its cheeriness, its freedom from anxiety and care—all these things are directly ministered to, and preserved by, a life of simple faith that casts itself upon God, and dwells securely, in joy and in restfulness, and not without a great light of hope, even when the shadows of evening are falling.

One of the greatest and most blessed of the characteristics of youth is the consciousness that the most of life lies before us; and to a Christian man, in any stage of his earthly life, that consciousness is possible. When he stands on the verge of the last sinking sandbank of time, and the water is up to his ankles, he may well feel that the best and the most of life is yet to be.

'The last of life, for which the first was made :

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, "A whole I planned.

Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all, nor be afraid."'

'They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of sap and green.' A gnarled old tree may be green in all its branches, and blossom and fruit may hang together there. The ideal of life is, that into each stage we shall carry the best of the preceding, harmonised with the best of the new, and that is possible to a Christian soul. The fountain of perpetual youth, of which the ancients fabled, is no fable, but a fact; and it rises, where the prophet in his vision saw the stream coming out, from beneath the threshold of the Temple door.

IV. So, lastly, I see here a beautiful example of a life which to the last is ready for danger and enterprise.

Caleb's words as to his undiminished strength were not meant for a boast. They express thankfulness and praise, and they are put as the ground of the request that he has to make. He gives a chivalrous reason for his petition when he says, 'Now, therefore, give me this mountain, *for* the Anakims (the giants) are there; and the cities great and fenced.'

Caleb's readiness for one more fight was fed by his reliance on God's help in it. When he says, 'It may be the Lord will be with me,' the *perhaps* is that of humility, not of doubt. The old warrior's eye flashes, and his voice sounds strong and full, as he ends his words with 'I *shall* drive them out, as *the Lord spake*.' That has the true ring. What were the three Anak chiefs, with their barbarous names, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, and their giant stature, to the onset of a warrior faith like that? Of course, 'Caleb drove

out thence the three sons of Anak,' and Hebron became his inheritance. Nothing can stand against us, if we seek for our portion, not where advantages are greatest, but where difficulties and dangers are most rife, and cast ourselves into the conflict, sure that God is with us, though humbly wondering that we should be worthy of His all-conquering presence, and sure, therefore, that victory marches by our sides.

Old age is generally much more disposed to talk about its past victories than to fight new ones; to rest upon its arms, or upon its laurels, than to undertake fresh conflicts. Now and then we see a man, statesman or other, who, bearing the burden of threescore years and ten lightly, is still as alert of spirit, as eager for work, as bold for enterprise, as he was years before. And in nine cases out of ten such a man is a Christian; and his brilliant energy of service is due, not only, nor so much, to natural vigour of constitution as to religion, which has preserved his vigour because it has preserved his purity, and been to him a stimulus and an inspiration.

Danger is an attraction to the generous mind. It is the coward and the selfish man who are always looking for an easy place, where somebody else will do the work. This man felt that this miraculously prolonged life of his bound him to special service, and the fact that up in Hebron there were a fenced city and tall giants behind the battlements, was an additional reason for picking out that bit of the field as the place where he ought to be. Thank God, that spirit is not dead yet! It has lived all through the Christian Church, and flamed up in times of martyrdom. On missionary fields to-day, if one man falls two are ready to step into his place. It is the true spirit of the Christian soldier. 'A

great door and effectual is opened,' says Paul, 'and there are many adversaries.' He knew the door was opened *because* the adversaries were many. And because there were so many of them, would he run away? Some of us would have said: 'I must abandon that work, it bristles with difficulties; I cannot stop in that post, the bullets are whistling too fast.' Nay! says Paul; 'I abide till Pentecost'—a good long while—because the post is dangerous, and promises to be fruitful.

So, dear friends, if we would have lives on which we can look back, lives in which early freshness will last beyond the 'morning dew,' lives in which there shall come, day by day and moment by moment, abundant foretastes to stay our hunger until we sit at Christ's table in His kingdom, we must 'follow the Lord alway,' with no half-hearted surrender, nor partial devotion, but give ourselves to Him utterly, to be guided and sent where He will. And then, like Caleb, we shall be able to say, with a 'perhaps,' not of doubt, but of wonder, that it should be so, to us unworthy, 'It may be the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out.' In all these things 'we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

THE CITIES OF REFUGE

'The Lord also spake unto Joshua, saying, 2. Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: 3. That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. 5. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. 6. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that

shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled. 7. And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. 8. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. 9. These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.'—
JOSHUA XX. 1-9.

OUR Lord has taught us that parts of the Mosaic legislation were given because of the 'hardness' of the people's hearts. The moral and religious condition of the recipients of revelation determines and is taken into account in the form and contents of revelation. That is strikingly obvious in this institution of the 'cities of refuge.' They have no typical meaning, though they may illustrate Christian truth. But their true significance is that they are instances of revelation permitting, and, while permitting, checking, a custom for the abolition of which Israel was not ready.

I. Cities of refuge were needed, because the 'avenger of blood' was recognised as performing an imperative duty. 'Blood for blood' was the law for the then stage of civilisation. The weaker the central authority, the more need for supplementing it with the wild justice of personal avenging. Neither Israel nor surrounding nations were fit for the higher commandment of the Sermon on the Mount. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' corresponded to their stage of progress; and to have hurried them forward to 'I say unto you, Resist not evil,' would only have led to weakening the restraint on evil, and would have had no response in the hearers' consciences. It is a commonplace that legislation which is too far ahead of public opinion is useless, except to make hypocrites. And the divine law was shaped in accordance with that truth. Therefore the

goel, or kinsman-avenger of blood, was not only permitted but enjoined by Moses.

But the evils inherent in his existence were great. Blood feuds were handed down through generations, involving an ever-increasing number of innocent people, and finally leading to more murders than they prevented. But the thing could not be abolished. Therefore it was checked by this institution. The lessons taught by it are the gracious forbearance of God with the imperfections attaching to each stage of His people's moral and religious progress; the uselessness of violent changes forced on people who are not ready for them; the presence of a temporary element in the Old Testament law and ethics.

No doubt many things in the present institutions of so-called Christian nations and in the churches are destined to drop away, as the principles of Christianity become more clearly discerned and more honestly applied to social and national life. But the good shepherd does not overdrive his flock, but, like Jacob, 'leads on softly, according to the pace of the cattle that is before' him. We must be content to bring the world gradually to the Christian ideal. To abolish or to impose institutions or customs by force is useless. Revolutions made by violence never last. To fell the upas-tree may be very heroic, but what is the use of doing it, if the soil is full of seeds of others, and the climate and conditions favourable to their growth? Change the elevation of the land, and the 'flora' will change itself. Institutions are the outcome of the whole mental and moral state of a nation, and when that changes, and not till then, do they change. The New Testament in its treatment of slavery and war shows us the Christian way of destroying evils; namely, by estab-

lishing the principles which will make them impossible. It is better to girdle the tree and leave it do die than to fell it.

II. Another striking lesson from the cities of refuge is the now well-worn truth that the same act, when done from different motives, is not the same. The kinsman-avenger took no heed of the motive of the slaying. His duty was to slay, whatever the slayer's intention had been. The asylum of the city of refuge was open for the unintentional homicide, and for him only. Deliberate murder had no escape thither. So the lesson was taught that motive is of supreme importance in determining the nature of an act. In God's sight, a deed is done when it is determined on, and it is not done, though done, when it was not meant by the doer. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,' and he that killeth his brother unawares is none. We suppose ourselves to have learned that so thoroughly that it is trivial to repeat the lesson.

What, then, of our thoughts and desires which never come to light in acts? Do we recognise our criminality in regard to these as vividly as we should? Do we regulate the hidden man of the heart accordingly? A man may break all the commandments sitting in an easy-chair and doing nothing. Von Moltke fought the Austro-Prussian war in his cabinet in Berlin, bending over maps. The soldiers on the field were but pawns in the dreadful game. So our battles are waged, and we are beaten or conquerors, on the field of our inner desires and purposes. 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'

III. The elaborately careful specification of cases which gave the fugitive a right to shelter in the city is set forth at length in Numbers xxxv. 15-24, and Deutero-

nomy xix. 4-13. The broad principle is there laid down that the cities were open for one who slew a man 'unwittingly.' But the plea of not intending to slay was held to be negatived, not only if intention could be otherwise shown but if the weapon used was such as would probably kill; such, for instance, as 'an instrument of iron,' or a stone, or a 'weapon of wood, whereby a man may die.' If we do what is likely to have a given result, we are responsible for that result, should it come about, even though we did not consciously seek to bring it. That is plain common sense. 'I never thought the house would catch fire' is no defence from the guilt of burning it down, if we fired a revolver into a powder barrel. Further, if the fatal blow was struck in 'hatred,' or if the slayer had lain in ambush to catch his victim, he was not allowed shelter. These careful definitions freed the cities from becoming nests of desperate criminals, as the 'sanctuaries' of the Middle Ages in Europe became. They were not harbours for the guilty, but asylums for the innocent.

IV. The procedure by which the fugitive secured protection is described at length in the passages cited, with which the briefer account here should be compared. It is not quite free from obscurity, but probably the process was as follows. Suppose the poor hunted man arrived panting at the limits of the city, perhaps with the avenger's sword within half a foot of his neck; he was safe for the time. But before he could enter the city, a preliminary inquiry was held 'at the gate' by the city elders. That could only be of a rough-and-ready kind; most frequently there would be no evidence available but the man's own word. It, however, secured *interim* protection. A fuller investigation followed, and, as would appear, was held in

another place,—perhaps at the scene of the accident. ‘The congregation’ was the judge in this second examination, where the whole facts would be fully gone into, probably in the presence of the avenger. If the plea of non-intention was sustained, the fugitive was ‘restored to his city of refuge,’ and there remained safely till the death of the high-priest, when he was at liberty to return to his home, and to stay there without fear.

Attempts have been made to find a spiritual significance in this last provision of the law, and to make out a lame parallel between the death of the high-priest, which cancelled the crime of the fugitive, and the death of Christ, which takes away our sins. But—to say nothing of the fact that the fugitive was where he was just because he had done no crime—the parallel breaks down at other points. It is more probable that the death of one high-priest and the accession of another were regarded simply as closing one epoch and beginning another, just as a king’s accession is often attended with an amnesty. It was natural to begin a new era with a clean sheet, as it were.

V. The selection of the cities brings out a difference between the Jewish right of asylum and the somewhat similar right in heathen and mediæval times. The temples or churches were usually the sanctuaries in these. But not the Tabernacle or Temple, but the priestly cities, were chosen here. Their inhabitants represented God to Israel, and as such were the fit persons to cast a shield over the fugitives; while yet their cities were less sacred than the Temple, and in them the innocent man-slayer could live for long years. The sanctity of the Temple was preserved intact, the necessary provision for possibly protracted stay was

made, evils attendant on the use of the place of worship as a refuge were avoided.

Another reason—namely, accessibility swiftly from all parts of the land—dictated the choice of the cities, and also their number and locality. There were three on each side of Jordan, though the population was scantier on the east than on the west side, for the extent of country was about the same. They stood, roughly speaking, opposite each other,—Kedesh and Golan in the north, Shechem and Ramoth central, Hebron and Bezer in the south. So, wherever a fugitive was, he had no long distance between himself and safety.

We too have a 'strong city' to which we may 'continually resort.' The Israelite had right to enter only if his act had been inadvertent, but we have the right to hide ourselves in Christ just because we have sinned wilfully. The hurried, eager flight of the man who heard the tread of the avenger behind him, and dreaded every moment to be struck to the heart by his sword, may well set forth what should be the earnestness of our flight to 'lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel.' His safety, as soon as he was within the gate, and could turn round and look calmly at the pursuer shaking his useless spear and grinding his teeth in disappointment, is but a feeble shadow of the security of those who rest in Christ's love, and are sheltered by His work for sinners. 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of My hand.'

THE END OF THE WAR

'And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. 44. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that He swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

'Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 2. And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses, the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: 3. Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. 4. And now the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as He promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan. 5. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all your heart, and with all your soul. 6. So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. 7. Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan: but unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them, 8. And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. 9. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.—JOSHUA xxi. 43-45; xxii. 1-9.

'THE old order changeth, giving place to new.' In this passage we have the breaking up of the congregation and the disbanding of the victorious army. The seven years of fighting had come to an end. The swords were to be 'beaten into plowshares,' and the comrades who had marched shoulder to shoulder, and shared the fierce excitement of many a bloody field, were to be scattered, each becoming a peaceful farmer or shepherd. A picturesque historian, of the modern 'special correspondent' sort, would have overlaid the narrative with sentiment and description; but how quietly the writer tells it, so that we have to bethink ourselves before we apprehend that we are reading the account of an

epoch-making event! He fixes attention on two things, —the complete fulfilment of God's promises (xxi. 43-45) and the dismissal to their homes of the contingent from the trans-Jordanic tribes, whose departure was the signal that the war was ended (xxii. 1-8). We may consider the lessons from these two separately.

I. The triumphant record of God's faithfulness (xxi. 43-45). These three verses are the trophy reared on the battlefield, like the lion of Marathon, which the Greeks set on its sacred soil. But the only name inscribed on this monument is Jehovah's. Other memorials of victories have borne the pompous titles of commanders who arrogated the glory to themselves; but the Bible knows of only one conqueror, and that is God. 'The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself.' The military genius and heroic constancy of Joshua, the eagerness for perilous honour that flamed, undimmed by age, in Caleb, the daring and strong arms of many a humble private in the ranks, have their due recognition and reward; but when the history that tells of these comes to sum up the whole, and to put the 'philosophy' of the conquest into a sentence, it has only one name to speak as cause of Israel's victory.

That is the true point of view from which to look at the history of the world and of the church in the world. The difference between the 'miraculous' conquest of Canaan and the 'ordinary' facts of history is not that God did the one and men do the other; both are equally, though in different methods, His acts. In the field of human affairs, as in the realm of nature, God is immanent, though in the former His working is complicated by the mysterious power of man's will to set itself in antagonism to His; while yet, in manner

insoluble to us, His will is supreme. The very powers which are arrayed against Him are His gift, and the issues which they finally subserve are His appointment. It does not need that we should be able to pierce to the bottom of the bottomless in order to attain and hold fast by the great conviction that 'there is no power but of God,' and that 'from Him are all things, and to Him are all things.'

Especially does this trophy on the battlefield teach a needful lesson to us in the Christian warfare. We are ever apt to think too much of our visible weapons and leaders, and to forget our unseen and ever-present Commander, from whom comes all our power. We 'burn incense to our own net, and sacrifice to our own drag,' and, like the heathen conqueror of whom Habakkuk speaks, make our swords our gods (Hab. i. 11, 16). The Church has always been prone to hero-worship, and to the idolatry of its organisation, its methods, or its theology. Augustine did so and so; Luther smote the 'whited wall' (the Pope) a blow that made him reel; the Pilgrim Fathers carried a slip of the plant of religious liberty in a tiny pot across the Atlantic, and watered it with tears till it has grown a great tree; the Wesleys revived a formal Church,—let us sing hallelujahs to these great names! By all means; but do not let us forget whence they drew their power; and let us listen to Paul's question, 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but servants through whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?' And let us carve, deep-cut and indelible, in solitary conspicuousness, on the trophy that we rear on each well-fought field, the name of no man save 'Jesus only.' We read that on a pyramid in Egypt the name and sounding titles of the king in whose reign it

was erected were blazoned on the plaster facing, but beneath that transitory inscription the name of the architect was hewn, imperishable, in the granite, and stood out when the plaster dropped away. So, when all the short-lived records which ascribe the events of the Church's progress to her great men have perished, the one name of the true builder will shine out, and 'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.' Let us not rely on our own skill, courage, talents, orthodoxy, or methods, nor try to 'build tabernacles' for the witnessing servants beside the central one for the supreme Lord, but ever seek to deepen our conviction that Christ, and Christ only, gives all their powers to all, and that to Him, and Him only, is all victory to be ascribed. That is an elementary and simple truth; but if we really lived in its power we should go into the battle with more confidence, and come out of it with less self-gratulation.

We may note, too, in these verses, the threefold repetition of one thought, that of God's punctual and perfect fulfilment of His word. He 'gave unto Israel all the land which He swore to give'; 'He gave them rest, . . . according to all that He swore'; 'there failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken.' It is the joy of thankful hearts to compare the promise with the reality, to lay the one upon the other, as it were, and to declare how precisely their outlines correspond. The finished building is exactly according to the plans drawn long before. God gives us the power of checking His work, and we are unworthy to receive His gifts if we do not take delight in marking and proclaiming how completely He has fulfilled His contract. It is no small part of Christian duty, and a still greater part of Christian blessedness,

to do this. Many a fulfilment passes unnoticed, and many a joy, which might be sacred and sweet as a token of love from His own hand, remains common and unhallowed, because we fail to see that it is a fulfilled promise. The eye that is trained to watch for God's being as good as His word will never have long to wait for proofs that He is so. 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.' And to such a one faith will become easier, being sustained by experience; and a present thus manifestly studded with indications of God's faithfulness will merge into a future still fuller of these. For it does not need that we should wait for the end of the war to have many a token that His every word is true. The struggling soldier can say, 'No good thing has failed of all that the Lord has spoken.' We look, indeed, for completer fulfilment when the fighting is done; but there are 'brooks by the way' for the warriors in the thick of the fight, of which they drink, and, refreshed, 'lift up the head.' We need not postpone this glad acknowledgment till we can look back and down from the land of peace on the completed campaign, but may rear this trophy on many a field, whilst still we look for another conflict to-morrow.

II. The disbanding of the contingent from the tribes across Jordan (xxii. 1-8). Forty thousand fighting men, of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manasseh, had willingly helped in the conquest, leaving their own newly-won homes on the eastern side of Jordan, and for seven long years taking their share in the hardships and dangers of their brethren. It was no small tax which they had thus cheerfully paid for the sake of brotherly unity. Their aid had not

only been valuable as strengthening Joshua's force, but still more so as a witness of the unbroken oneness of the nation, and of the sympathy which the tribes already settled bore to the others. Politically, it was wise to associate the whole people in the whole conquest; for nothing welds a nation together like the glories of common victories and the remembrance of common dangers survived. The separation of the trans-Jordanic tribes by the rapid river, and by their pastoral life, was a possible source of weakness, and would, no doubt, have led to more complete severance, if it had not been for the uniting power of the campaign. If the forty thousand had been quietly feeding sheep on the uplands while their brethren were fighting among the stony hills of Canaan, a great gulf would have opened between them. Even as it was, the eastern tribes drifted somewhat away from the western; but the disintegration would have been still more complete if no memories of the war, when all Israel stood side by side, had lived on among them. Their share in the conquest was not only a piece of policy,—it was the natural expression of the national brotherhood. Even if Joshua had not ordered their presence, it would have been impossible for them to stop in their peacefulness and let their brethren bear the brunt of battle.

The law for us is the same as for these warriors. In the family, the city, the nation, the Church, and the world, union with others binds us to help them in their conflicts, and that especially if we are blessed with secure possessions, while they have to struggle for theirs. We are tempted to selfish lives of indulgence in our quiet peace, and sometimes think it hard that we should be expected to buckle on our armour, and

leave our leisurely repose, because our brethren ask the help of our arms. If we did as Reuben and Gad did, would there be so many rich men who never stir a finger to relieve poverty, so many Christians whose religion is much more selfish than beneficent? Would so many souls be left to toil without help, to struggle without allies, to weep without comforters, to wander in the dark without a guide? All God's gifts in providence and in the Gospel are given that we may have somewhat wherewith to bless our less happy brethren. 'The service of man' is not the substitute for, but the expression of, Christianity. Are we not kept here, on this side Jordan, away for a time from our inheritance, for the very same reason that these men were separated from theirs,—that we may strike some strokes for God and our fellows in the great war? Dives, who lolls on his soft cushions, and has less pity for Lazarus than the dogs have, is Cain come to life again; and every Christian is either his brother's keeper or his murderer. Would that the Church of to-day, with infinitely deeper and sacreder ties knitting it to suffering, struggling humanity, had a tithe of the willing relinquishment of legitimate possessions and patient participation in the long campaign for God which kept these rude soldiers faithful to their flag and forgetful of home and ease, till their general gave them their discharge!

Note the commander's parting charge. They were about to depart for a life of comparative separation from the mass of the nation. Their remoteness and their occupations drew them away from the current of the national life, and gave them a kind of quasi-independence. They would necessarily be less directly under Joshua's control than the other tribes were. He sends them away with one commandment, the

imperative stringency of which is expressed by the accumulation of expressions in verse 5. They are to give diligent heed to the law of Moses. Their obedience is to be based on love to God, who is their God no less than the God of the other tribes. It is to be comprehensive—they are ‘to walk in all His ways’; it is to be resolute—they are ‘to cleave to Him’; it is to be wholehearted and whole-souled service, that will be the true bond between the separated parts of the whole. Independence so limited will be harmless; and, however wide apart their paths may lie, Israel will be one. In like manner the bond that knits all divisions of God’s people together, however different their modes of life and thought, however unlike their homes and their work, is the similarity of relation to God. They are one in a common faith, a common love, a common obedience. Wider waters than Jordan part them. Graver differences of tasks and outlooks than separated these two sections of Israel part them. But all are one who love and obey the one Lord. The closer we cleave to Him, the nearer we shall be to all His tribes.

We need only note in a word how these departing soldiers, leaving the battlefield with their commander’s praise and benediction, laden with much wealth, the spoil of their enemies, and fording the stream to reach the peaceful homes, which had long stood ready for them, may be taken, by a permissible play of fancy, as symbols of the faithful servants and soldiers of the true Joshua, at the end of their long warfare passing to the ‘kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world,’ bearing in their hands the wealth which, by God’s grace, they had conquered from out of things here. *They* are not sent away by their Commander, but summoned by Him to the great peace of

His own presence; and while His lips give them the praise which is praise indeed, they inscribe on the perpetual memorial which they rear no name but His, who first wrought all their works in them, and now has ordained eternal peace for them.

THE NATIONAL OATH AT SHECHEM

'And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good. 21. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord. 22. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him. And they said, We are witnesses. 23. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. 24. And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey. 25. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. 26. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. 27. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God. 28. So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.'—JOSHUA xxiv. 19-28.

WE reach in this passage the close of an epoch. It narrates the last public act of Joshua and the last of the assembled people before they scatter 'every man unto his inheritance.' It was fitting that the transition from the nomad stage to that of settled abode in the land should be marked by the solemn renewal of the covenant, which is thus declared to be the willingly accepted law for the future national life. We have here the closing scene of that solemn assembly set before us.

The narrative carries us to Shechem, the lovely valley in the heart of the land, already consecrated by many patriarchal associations, and by that picturesque scene (Joshua viii. 30-35), when the gathered nation,

ranged on the slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, listened to Joshua reading 'all that Moses commanded.' There, too, the coffin of Joseph, which had been reverently carried all through the desert and the war, was laid in the ground that Jacob had bought five hundred years ago, and which now had fallen to Joseph's descendants, the tribe of Ephraim. There was another reason for the selection of Shechem for this renewal of the covenant. The gathered representatives of Israel stood, at Shechem, on the very soil where, long ago, Abram had made his first resting-place as a stranger in the land, and had received the first divine pledge, 'unto thy seed will I give this land,' and had piled beneath the oak of Moreh his first altar (of which the weathered stones might still be there) to 'the Lord, who appeared unto him.' It was fitting that this cradle of the nation should witness their vow, as it witnessed the fulfilment of God's promise. What Plymouth Rock is to one side of the Atlantic, or Hastings Field to the other, Shechem was to Israel. Vows sworn there had sanctity added by the place. Nor did these remembrances exhaust the appropriateness of the site. The oak, which had waved green above Abram's altar, had looked down on another significant incident in the life of Jacob, when, in preparation for his journey to Bethel, he had made a clean sweep of the idols of his household, and buried them 'under the oak which was by Shechem' (Gen. xxxv. 2-4). His very words are quoted by Joshua in his command, in verse 23, and it is impossible to overlook the intention to parallel the two events. The spot which had seen the earlier act of purification from idolatry was for that very reason chosen for the later. It is possible that the same tree at whose roots the idols from beyond the

river, which Leah and Rachel had brought, had been buried, was that under which Joshua set up his memorial stone; and it is possible that the very stone had been part of Abram's altar. But, in any case, the place was sacred by these past manifestations of God and devotions of the fathers, so that we need not wonder that Joshua selected it rather than Shiloh, where the ark was, for the scene of this national oath of obedience. Patriotism and devotion would both burn brighter in such an atmosphere. These considerations explain also the designation of the place as 'the sanctuary of the Lord,'—a phrase which has led some to think of the Tabernacle, and apparently occasioned the Septuagint reading of 'Shiloh' instead of 'Shechem' in verses 1 and 25. The precise rendering of the preposition in verse 26 (which the Revised Version has put in the margin) shows that the Tabernacle is not meant; for how could the oak-tree be 'in' the Tabernacle? Clearly, the open space, hallowed by so many remembrances, and by the appearance to Abram, was regarded as a sanctuary.

The earlier part of this chapter shows that the people, by their representatives, responded with alacrity—which to Joshua seemed too eager—to his charge, and enumerated with too facile tongues God's deliverances and benefits. His ear must have caught some tones of levity, if not of insincerity, in the lightly-made vow. So he meets it with a douche of cold water in verses 19, 20, because he wishes to condense vaporous resolutions into something more tangible and permanent. Cold, judiciously applied, solidifies. Discouragements, rightly put, encourage. The best way to deepen and confirm good resolutions which have been too swiftly and inconsiderately formed, is to

state very plainly all the difficulty of keeping them. The hand that seems to repel, often most powerfully attracts. There is no better way of turning a somewhat careless 'we will' into a persistent 'nay, but we *will*,' than to interpose a 'ye cannot.' Many a boy has been made a sailor by the stories of hardships which his parents have meant as dissuasives. Joshua here is doing exactly what Jesus Christ often did. He refused glib vows because He desired whole hearts. His very longing that men should follow Him made Him send them back to bethink themselves when they promised to do it. 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!' was answered by no recognition of the speaker's enthusiasm, and by no word of pleasure or invitation, but by the apparently cold repulse: 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air roosting-places; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. That is what you are offering to share. Do you stand to your words?' So, when once 'great multitudes' came to Him He turned on them, with no invitation in His words, and told them the hard conditions of discipleship as being entire self-renunciation. He will have no soldiers enlisted under false pretences. They shall know the full difficulties and trials which they must meet; and if, knowing these, they still are willing to take His yoke upon them, then how exuberant and warm the welcome which He gives!

There is a real danger that this side of the evangelist's work should be overlooked in the earnestness with which the other side is done. We cannot be too emphatic in our reiteration of Christ's call to all the 'weary and heavy-laden' to come unto Him, nor too confident in our assurance that whosoever comes will not be 'cast out'; but we may be, and, I fear, often are,

defective in our repetition of Christ's demand for entire surrender, and of His warning to intending disciples of what they are taking upon them. We shall repel no true seeker by duly emphasising the difficulties of the Christian course. Perhaps, if there were more plain speaking about these at the beginning, there would be fewer backsliders and dead professors with 'a name to live.' Christ ran the risk of the rich ruler's going away sorrowful, and so should His messengers do. The sorrow tells of real desire, and the departure will sooner or later be exchanged for return with a deeper and more thorough purpose, if the earlier wish had any substance in it. If it had not, better that the consciousness of its hollowness should be forced upon the man, than that he should outwardly become what he is not really,—a Christian; for, in the one case, he may be led to reflection which may issue in thorough surrender; and in the other he will be a self-deceived deceiver, and probably an apostate.

Note the special form of Joshua's warning. It turns mainly on two points,—the extent of the obligations which they were so lightly incurring, and the heavy penalties of their infraction. As to the former, the vow to 'serve the Lord' had been made, as he fears, with small consideration of what it meant. In heathenism, the 'service' of a god is a mere matter of outward acts of so-called worship. There is absolutely no connection between religion and morality in idolatrous systems. The notion that the service of a god implies any duties in common life beyond ceremonial ones is wholly foreign to paganism in all its forms. The establishment of the opposite idea is wholly the consequence of revelation. So we need not wonder if the pagan conception of service was here in the minds of

the vowing assembly. If we look at their vow, as recorded in verses 16-18, we see nothing in it which necessarily implies a loftier idea. Jehovah is their national God, who has fought and conquered for them, therefore they will 'serve Him.' If we substitute Baal, or Chemosh, or Nebo, or Ra, for Jehovah, this is exactly what we read on Moabite stones and Assyrian tablets and Egyptian tombs. The reasons for the service, and the service itself, are both suspiciously external. We are not judging the people more harshly than Joshua did; for he clearly was not satisfied with them, and the tone of his answer sufficiently shows what he thought wrong in them. Observe that he does not call Jehovah 'your God.' He does so afterwards; but in this grave reply to their exuberant enthusiasm he speaks of Him only as 'the Lord,' as if he would put stress on the monotheistic conception, which, at all events, does not appear in the people's words, and was probably dim in their thoughts. Then observe that he broadly asserts the impossibility of their serving the Lord; that is, of course, so long as they continued in their then tone of feeling about Him and His service.

Then observe the points in the character of God on which he dwells, as indicating the points which were left out of view by the people, and as fitted to rectify their notions of service. First, 'He is an holy God.' The scriptural idea of the holiness of God has a wider sweep than we often recognise. It fundamentally means His supreme and inaccessible elevation above the creature; which, of course, is manifested in His perfect separation from all sin, but has not regard to this only. Joshua here urges the infinite distance between man and God, and especially the infinite moral distance, in order to enforce a profounder conception of what goes to God's

service. A holy God cannot have unholy worshippers. His service can be no mere ceremonial, but must be the bowing of the whole man before His majesty, the aspiration of the whole man after His loftiness, the transformation of the whole man into the reflection of His purity, the approach of the unholy to the Holy through a sacrifice which puts away sin.

Further, He is 'a jealous God.' 'Jealous' is an ugly word, with repulsive associations, and its application to God has sometimes been explained in ugly fashion, and has actually repelled men. But, rightly looked at, what does it mean but that God desires our whole hearts for His own, and loves us so much, and is so desirous to pour His love into us, that He will have no rivals in our love? The metaphor of marriage, which puts His love to men in the tenderest form, underlies this word, so harsh on the surface, but so gracious at the core.

There is still abundant need for Joshua's warning. We rejoice that it takes so little to be a Christian that the feeblest and simplest act of faith knits the soul to the all-forgiving Christ. But let us not forget that, on the other hand, it is hard to be a Christian indeed; for it means 'forsaking all that we have,' and loving God with all our powers. The measure of His love is the measure of His 'jealousy,' and He loves us no less than He did Israel. Unless our conceptions of His service are based upon our recognition of His holiness and demand for our all, we, too, 'cannot serve the Lord.'

The other half of Joshua's warnings refers to the penalties of the broken vows. These are put with extraordinary force. The declaration that the sins of the servants of God would not be forgiven is not, of course, to be taken so as to contradict the whole teaching of Scripture, but as meaning that the sins of His

people cannot be left unpunished. The closer relation between God and them made retribution certain. The law of Israel's existence, which its history ever since has exemplified, was here laid down, that their prosperity depended on their allegiance, and that their nearness to Him ensured His chastisement for their sin. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The remainder of the incident must be briefly disposed of. These warnings produced the desired effect; for Joshua did not seek to prevent, but to make more intelligent and firm, the people's allegiance. The resolve, repeated after fuller knowledge, is the best reward, as it is the earnest hope, of the faithful teacher, whose apparent discouragements are meant to purify and deepen, not to repress, the faintest wish to serve God. Having tested their sincerity, he calls them to witness that their resolution is perfectly voluntary; and, on their endorsing it as their free choice, he requires the putting away of their 'strange gods,' and the surrender of their inward selves to Him who, by this their action as well as by His benefits, becomes in truth 'the God of Israel.' Attempts have been made to evade the implication that idolatry had crept in among the people; but there can be no doubt of the plain, sad meaning of the words. They are a quotation of Jacob's, at the same spot, on a similar occasion centuries before. If there were no idols buried now under the old oak, it was not because there were none in Israel, but because they had not been brought by the people from their homes. Joshua's commands are the practical outcome of his previous words. If God be 'holy' and 'jealous,' serving Him must demand the forsaking of

all other gods, and the surrender of heart and self to Him. That is as true to-day as ever it was. The people accept the stringent requirement, and their repeated shout of obedience has a deeper tone than their first hasty utterance had. They have learned what service means,—that it includes more than ceremonies; and they are willing to obey His voice. Blessed those for whom the plain disclosure of all that they must give up to follow Him, only leads to the more assured and hearty response of willing surrender!

The simple but impressive ceremony which ratified the covenant thus renewed consisted of two parts,—the writing of the account of the transaction in ‘the book of the law’; and the erection of a great stone, whose grey strength stood beneath the green oak, a silent witness that Israel, by his own choice, after full knowledge of all that the vow meant, had reiterated his vow to be the Lord’s. Thus on the spot made sacred by so many ancient memories, the people ended their wandering and homeless life, and passed into the possession of the inheritance, through the portal of this fresh acceptance of the covenant, proclaiming thereby that they held the land on condition of serving God, and writing their own sentence in case of unfaithfulness. It was the last act of the assembled people, and the crown and close of Joshua’s career.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

A SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS AND GOD'S PATIENCE

'And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? 3. Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. 4. And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. 5. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the Lord. 6. And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. 7. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel. 8. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. 9. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. 10. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel.'—JUDGES ii. 1-10.

THE Book of Judges begins a new era, the development of the nation in its land. Chapters i. to iii. 6 contain two summaries: first, of the progress of the conquest; and second, of the history about to be unfolded in the book. The first part of this passage (verses 1-5) belongs to the former, and closes it; the second (verses 6-10) introduces the latter, and contrasts it with the state of things prevailing as long as the soldiers of Joshua lived.

I. 'The Angel of the Lord' had appeared to Joshua in Gilgal at the beginning of the war, and issued his orders as 'Captain of the Lord's host.' Now He reappears to

ask why his orders had not been carried out, and to announce that victory was no longer to attend Israel's arms. Nothing can be plainer than that the Angel speaks as one in whom the divine name dwells. His reiterated 'I's' are incomprehensible on any other hypothesis than that He is that mysterious person, distinct from and yet one with Jehovah, whom we know as the 'Word made flesh.' His words here are stern. He enumerates the favours which He had showed to Israel, and which should have inspired them to glad obedience. He recalls the conditions on which they had received the land; namely, that they were to enter into no entangling alliances with the remnant of the inhabitants, and especially to have no tolerance for their idolatry. Here we may observe that, according to Joshua's last charge, the extermination of the native peoples was not contemplated, but that there should be no such alliances as would peril Israel's observance of the covenant (Joshua xxiii. 7, 12). He charges them with disobedience, and asks the same question as had been asked of Eve, 'What is this ye have done?' And He declares the punishment about to follow, in the paralysing of Israel's conquering arm by the withdrawal of His conquering might, and in the seductions from the native inhabitants to which they would fall victims.

Note, then, how God's benefits aggravate our disobedience, and how He bases His right to command on them. Further, note how His promises are contingent on our fulfilment of their conditions, and how a covenant which He has sworn that He will never break He does count as non-existent when men break it. Again, observe the sharp arraignment of the faithless, and the forcing of them to bethink themselves of the true character of

their deeds, or, if we adopt the Revised Version's rendering, of the unreasonableness of departing from God. No man dare answer when God asks, 'What hast thou done?' No man can answer reasonably when He asks, 'Why hast thou done it?' Once more, note that His servants sin when they allow themselves to be so mixed up with the world that they are in peril of learning its ways and getting a snare to their souls. We have all unconquered 'Canaanites' in our hearts, and amity with them is supreme folly and crying wickedness. 'Thorough' must be our motto. Many times have the conquered overcome their conquerors, as in Rome's conquest of Greece, the Goths' conquest of Rome, the Normans' conquest of England. Israel was in some respects conquered by Canaanites and other conquered tribes. Let us take care that we are not overcome by our inward foes, whom we fancy we have subdued and can afford to treat leniently.

Again, God punishes our making truce with our spiritual foes by letting the effects of the truce work themselves out. He said to Israel, in effect: 'If you make alliances with the people of the land, you shall no longer have power to cast them out. The swift rush of the stream of victory shall be stayed. You have chosen to make them your friends, and their friendship shall produce its natural effects, of tempting you to imitation.' The increased power of our unsubdued evils is the punishment, as it is the result, of tolerance of them. We wanted to keep them, and dreamed that we could control them. Keep them we shall, control them we cannot. They will master us if we do not expel them. No wonder that the place was named Bochim ('Weepers'), when such stern words were thundered forth. Tears flow easily; and many

a sin is wept for once, and afterwards repeated often. So it was with Israel, as the narrative goes on to tell. Let us take the warning, and give heed to make repentance deep and lasting.

II. Verses 6-10 go back to an earlier period than the appearance of the Angel. We do not know how long the survivors of the conquering army lived in sufficient numbers to leaven opinion and practice. We may, however, roughly calculate that the youngest of these would be about twenty when the war began, and that about fifty years would see the end of the host that had crossed Jordan and stormed Jericho. If Joshua was of about the same age as Caleb, he would be about eighty at the beginning of the conquest, and lived thirty years afterwards, so that about twenty years after his death would be the limit of 'the elders that out-lived Joshua.'

Verses 6-9 substantially repeat Joshua xxiv. 28-31, and are here inserted to mark not only the connection with the former book, but to indicate the beginning of a new epoch. The facts narrated in this paragraph are but too sadly in accord with the uniform tendencies of our poor weak nature. As long as some strong personality leads a nation or a church, it keeps true to its early fervour. The first generation which has lived through some great epoch, when God's arm has been made bare, retains the impression of His power. But when the leader falls, it is like withdrawing a magnet, and the heap of iron filings tumbles back to the ground inert. Think of the post-Apostolic age of the Church, of Germany in the generation after Luther, not to come nearer home, and we must see that Israel's experience was an all but universal one. It is hard to keep a community even of professing Christians on

the high level. No great cause is ever launched which does not lose 'way' as it continues. 'Having begun in the Spirit,' all such are too apt to continue 'in the flesh.' The original impulses wane, friction begins to tell. Custom clogs the wheels. The fiery lava-stream cools and slackens. So it always has been. Therefore God has to change His instruments, and churches need to be shaken up, and sometimes broken up, 'lest one good,' when it has degenerated into 'custom,' should 'corrupt the world.'

But we shall miss the lesson here taught if we do not apply it to tendencies in ourselves, and humbly recognise that we are in danger of being 'hindered,' however 'well' we may have begun to 'run,' and that our only remedy is to renew continually our first-hand vision of 'the great works of the Lord,' and our consecration to His service. It is a poor affair if, like Israel, our devotion to God depends on Joshua's life, or, like King Joash, we do that which is 'right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.'

ISRAEL'S OBSTINACY AND GOD'S PATIENCE

'And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim : 12. And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. 13. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. 14. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. 15. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them : and they were greatly distressed. 16. Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. 17. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them : they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord ; but they did not so. 18. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge : for it repented the Lord because of their groanings, by reason of them that oppressed them, and vexed them. 19. And it came to pass,

when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. 20. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, Because that this people hath transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice; 21. I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: 22. That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. 23. Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered He them into the hand of Joshua.'—JUDGES ii. 11-23.

THIS passage sums up the Book of Judges, and also the history of Israel for over four hundred years. Like the overture of an oratorio, it sounds the main themes of the story which follows. That story has four chapters, repeated with dreary monotony over and over again. They are: Relapse into idolatry, retribution, respite and deliverance, and brief return to God. The last of these phases soon passes into fresh relapse, and then the old round is gone all over again, as regularly as the white and red lights and the darkness reappear in a revolving lighthouse lantern, or the figures recur in a circulating decimal fraction. That sad phrase which begins this lesson, 'The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord,' is repeated at the beginning of each new record of apostacy, on which duly follow, as outlined here, the oppression by the enemy, the raising up of a deliverer, the gleam of brightness which dies with him, and then, *da capo*, 'the children of Israel did evil,' and all the rest as before. The names change, but the incidents are the same. There is something extremely impressive in this uniformity of the plan of the book, which thus sets in so strong light the persistence through generations of the same bad strain in the nation's blood, and the unwearying patience of God. The story of these successive recurrences of the same sequence of events occupies the book to the end of chapter xvi., and the remainder of it is taken up with

two wild stories deeply stained with the lawlessness and moral laxity of these anarchic times. We may best bring out the force of this summary by considering in their order the four stages signalised.

I. The first is the continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. The fact itself, and the frank prominence given to it in the Old Testament, are both remarkable. As to the latter, certainly, if the Old Testament histories have the same origin as the chronicles of other nations, they present most anomalous features. Where do we find any other people whose annals contain nothing that can minister to national vanity, and have for one of their chief themes the sins of the nation? The history of Israel, as told in Scripture, is one long indictment of Israel. The peculiarity is explicable, if we believe that, whoever or how numerous soever its authors, God was its true Author, as He is its true theme, and that the object of its histories is not to tell the deeds of Israel, but those of God for Israel.

As to the fact of the continual relapses into idolatry, nothing could be more natural than that the recently received and but imperfectly assimilated revelation of the one God, with its stringent requirements of purity, and its severe prohibition of idols, should easily slip off from these rude and merely outward worshippers. Joshua's death without a successor, the dispersion of the tribes, the difficulty of communication when much of the country was still in the hands of its former possessors, would all weaken the sense of unity, which was too recent to be firm, and would expose the isolated Israelites to the full force of the temptation to idolatry. It is difficult for us fairly to judge the immense strain required for resistance to it. The conception of one sole God was too high to be easily retained. A shrine

without a deity seemed bare and empty. The Law stringently bridled passions which the hideous worship of the Canaanites stimulated. No wonder that, when the first generation of the conquerors had passed away, their successors lapsed into the universal polytheism, with its attendant idolatry and immorality. Instead of thinking of the Israelites as monsters of ingratitude and backsliding, we come nearer the truth, and make a better use of the history, when we see in it a mirror which shows us our own image. The strong earthward pull is ever acting on us, and, unless God hold us up, we too shall slide downwards. 'Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods? but My people hath changed their glory for that which doth not profit.' Idolatry and worldliness are persistent; for they are natural. Firm adherence to God is less common, because it goes against the strong forces, within and without, which bind us to earth.

Apparently the relapses into idolatry did not imply the entire abandonment of the worship of Jehovah, but the worship of Baalim and Ashtaroth along with it. Such illegitimate mixing up of deities was accordant with the very essence of polytheism, and repugnant to that of the true worship of God. The one may be tolerant, the other cannot be. To unite Baal with Jehovah was to forsake Jehovah.

These continual relapses have an important bearing on the question of the origin of the 'Jewish conception of God.' They are intelligible only if we take the old-fashioned explanation, that its origin was a divine revelation, given to a rude people. They are unintelligible if we take the new-fashioned explanation that the monotheism of Israel was the product of natural evolution, or was anything but a treasure put by God

into their hands, which they did not appreciate, and would willingly have thrown away. The foul Canaanitish worship was the kind of thing in which, if left to themselves, they would have wallowed. How came such people by such thoughts as these? The history of Israel's idolatry is not the least conclusive proof of the supernatural revelation which made Israel's religion.

II. Note the swift-following retribution. We have two sections in the context dealing with this, each introduced by that terrible phrase, which recurs so often in the subsequent parts of the book, 'The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.' That phrase is no sign of a lower conception of God than that which the gospel brings. Wrath is an integral part of love, when the lover is perfectly righteous and the loved are sinful. The most terrible anger is the anger of perfect gentleness, as expressed in that solemn paradox of the Apostle of love, when he speaks of 'the wrath of the Lamb.' God was angry with Israel because He loved them, and desired their love for their own good. The fact of His choice of the nation for His own and the intensity of His love were shown no less by the swift certainty with which suffering dogged sin, than by the blessings which crowned obedience. The first section, referring to the punishment, is in verses 14 and 15, which seems to describe mainly the defeats and plunderings which outside surrounding nations inflicted. The brief description is extraordinarily energetic. It ascribes all their miseries to God's direct act. He 'delivered' them over, or, as the next clause says still more strongly, 'sold' them, to plunderers, who stripped them bare. Their defeats were the result of His having thus ceased to regard them as His. But though He had 'sold'

them, He had not done with them; for it was not only the foeman's hand that struck them, but God's 'hand was against them,' and its grip crushed them. His judgments were not occasional, but continuous, and went with them 'whithersoever they went out.' Everything went wrong with them; there were no gleams breaking the black thunder-cloud. God's anger darkened the whole sky, and blasted the whole earth. And the misery was the more miserable and awful because it had all been foretold, and in it God was but doing 'as He had said' and sworn. It is a dreadful picture of the all-withering effect of God's anger,—a picture which is repeated in inmost verity in many an outwardly prosperous life to-day.

The second section is in verses 20-23, and describes the consequence of Israel's relapse in reference to the surviving Canaanite and other tribes in the land itself. Note that 'nation' in verse 20 is the term usually applied, not to Israel, but to the Gentile peoples; and that its use here seems equivalent to cancelling the choice of Israel as God's special possession, and reducing them to the level of the other nations in Canaan, to whom the same term is applied in verse 21. The stern words which are here put into the mouth of God may possibly refer to the actual message recorded in the first verses of the chapter; but, more probably, 'the Lord said' does not here mean any divine communication, but only the divine resolve, conceived as spoken to himself. It embodies the divine *lex talionis*. The punishment is analogous to the crime. Israel had broken the covenant; God would not keep His promise. That involves a great principle as to all God's promises,—that they are all conditional, and voidable by men's failure to fulfil their conditions. Observe, too, that the punishment is the

retention of the occasions of the sin. Is not that, too, a law of the divine procedure to-day? Whips to scourge us are made of our pleasant vices. Sin is the punishment of sin. If we yield to some temptation, part of the avenging retribution is that the temptation abides by us, and has power over us. The 'Canaanites' whom we have allowed to lead us astray will stay beside us when their power to seduce us is done, and will pull off their masks and show themselves for what they are, our spoilers and foes.

The rate of Israel's conquest was determined by Israel's faithful adherence to God. That is a standing law. Victory for us in all the good fight of life depends on our cleaving to Him, and forsaking all other.

The divine motive, if we may so say, in leaving the unsubdued nations in the land, was to provide the means of proving Israel. Would it not have been better, since Israel was so weak, to secure for it an untempted period? Surely, it is a strange way of helping a man who has stumbled, to make provision that future occasions of stumbling shall lie in his path. But so the perfect wisdom which is perfect love ever ordains. There shall be no unnatural greenhouse shelter provided for weak plants. The liability to fall imposes the necessity of trial, but the trial does not impose the necessity of falling! The Devil tempts, because he hopes that we shall fall. God tries, in order that we may stand, and that our feet may be strengthened by the trial. 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for,—not without dust and heat.'

III. Respite and deliverance are described in verses

16 and 18. The Revised Version has wisely substituted a simple 'and' for 'nevertheless' at the beginning of verse 16. The latter word implies that the raising up of the judges was a reversal of what had gone before; 'and' implies that it was a continuation. And its use here is not merely an instance of inartificial Hebrew style, but carries the lesson that God's judgment and deliverance come from the same source, and are harmonious parts of one educational process. Nor is this thought negated by the statement in verse 18 that 'it repented the Lord.' That strong metaphorical ascription to Him of human emotion simply implies that His action, which of necessity is the expression of His will, was changed. The will of the moment before had been to punish; the will of the next moment was to deliver, because their 'groaning' showed that the punishment had done its work. But the two wills were one in ultimate purpose, and the two sets of acts were equally and harmoniously parts of one design. The surgeon is carrying out one plan when he cuts deep into the quivering flesh, and when he sews up the wounds which he himself has made. God's deliverances are linked to His chastisements by 'and,' not by 'nevertheless.' We need not discuss that remarkable series of judges, who were champions rather than the peaceful functionaries whom we understand by the name. The vivid and stirring stories associated with their names make the bulk of this book, and move the most peace-loving among us like the sound of a trumpet. These wild warriors, with many a roughness and flaw in their characters, of whom no saintly traits are recorded, are yet treated in this section as directly inspired, and as continually upheld by God. The writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* claims some of them as heroes of

'faith.' And one chief lesson for us to learn, as we look on the strange garb in which in them faith has arrayed itself, and the strange work which it does in nerving hands to strike with sharp swords, is the oneness of the principle amid the most diverse manifestations, and the nobleness and strength which the sense of belonging to God and reliance on His help breathe into the rudest life and shed over the wildest scenes.

These judges were raised up indiscriminately from different tribes. They belonged to different ranks, and were of different occupations. One of them was a woman. The when and the where and the how of their appearance were incalculable. They authenticated their commission by no miracles except victory. For a time they started to the front, and then passed, leaving no successors, and founding no dynasty. They were an entirely unique order, plainly raised up by God, and drawing all their power from Him. Let us be thankful for the weaknesses, and even sins, recorded of some of them, and for the boldness with which the book traces the physical strength of a Samson, in spite of his wild animalism, and the bravery of a Jephthah, notwithstanding his savage vow and subsequent lapse into idolatry, to God's inspiration. Their faith was limited, and acted but imperfectly on their moral nature; but it was true faith, in the judgment of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Their work was rough and bloody, and they were rough tools, as such work needed; but it was God's work, and He had made them for His instruments, in the judgment of the Book of *Judges*. If we try to understand the reasons for such judgments, we may learn some useful lessons.

IV. A word only can be given to the last stage in the dreary round. It comes back to the first. The religion

of the delivered people lasted as long as the judge's life. When he died, it died. There is intense bitterness in the remark to that effect in verse 19. Did God then die with the judge? Was it Samson, or Jehovah, that had delivered? Why should the death of the instrument affect gratitude to the hand that gave it its edge? What a lurid light is thrown back on the unreality of the people's return to God by their swift relapse! If it needed a human hand to keep them from departing, had they ever come near? We may press the questions on ourselves; for none of us knows how much of our religion is owing to the influence of men upon us, or how much of it would drop away if we were left to ourselves.

This miserable repetition of the same weary round of sin, punishment, respite, and renewed sin, sets in a strong light the two great wonders of man's obstinate persistency in unfaithfulness and sin, and of God's unwearied persistency in discipline and patient forgiveness. His charity 'suffers long and is kind, is not easily provoked.' We can weary out all forbearance but His, which is endless. We weary Him indeed, but we do not weary Him out, with our iniquities. Man's sin stretches far; but God's patient love overlaps it. It lasts long; but God's love is eternal. It resists miracles of chastisement and love; but He does not cease His use of the rod and the staff. We can tire out all other forbearance, but not His. And however old and obstinate our rebellion, He waits to pardon, and smites but to heal.

RECREANT REUBEN

'Why satest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.'—JUDGES v. 16 (R.V.).

I. THE fight.

The warfare is ever repeated, though in new forms.

In the highest form it is Christ *versus* the World.

And that conflict must be fought out in our own souls first. Our religion should lead not only to accept and rely on what Christ does for us, but to do and dare for Christ. He has given Himself for us, and has thereby won the right to recruit us as His soldiers. We have to fight against ourselves to establish His reign over ourselves.

And then we have to give our personal service in the great battle for right and truth, for establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. There come national crises when every man must take up arms, but in Christ's kingdom that is a permanent obligation. There the nation is the army. Each subject is not only His servant but His soldier. The metaphor is well worn, but it carries everlasting truth, and to take it seriously to heart would revolutionise our lives.

II. The reason for standing aloof.

Reuben 'abode in the sheepfolds to hear the pipings to the flocks.' For Dan his ships, for Asher his havens held them apart. Reuben and the other trans-Jordanic tribes held loosely by the national unity. They had fallen in love with an easy life of pastoral wealth, they did not care to venture anything for the national good. It is still too true that like reasons are largely operative in producing like results. It is seldom from the wealthy and leisurely classes that the bold fighters for great

social reformations are recruited. Times of commercial prosperity are usually times of stagnation in regard to these. Reuben lies lazily listening to the 'drowsy tinklings' that 'lull' not only 'the distant folds' but himself to inglorious slumber, while Zebulon and Naphtali are 'venturing their lives on the high places of the field.' The love of ease enervates many a one who should be doing valiantly for the 'Captain of his salvation.' The men of Reuben cared more for their sheep than for their nation. They were not minded to hazard these by listening to Deborah's call. And what their flocks were to that pastoral tribe, their business is to shoals of professing Christians. The love of the world depletes the ranks of Christ's army, and they are comparatively few who stick by the colours and are 'ready, aye ready' for service, as the brave motto of one English regiment has it. The lives of multitudes of so-called Christians are divided between strained energy in their business or trade or profession and self-regarding repose. No doubt competition is fierce, and, no doubt, a Christian man is bound, 'whatsoever his hand finds to do, to do it with his might,' and, no doubt, rest is as much a duty as work. But must not loyalty to Jesus have become tepid, if a servant of His has so little interest in the purposes for which He gave His life that he can hear no call to take active part in promoting them, nor find rest in the work by which he becomes a fellow-worker with his Lord?

III. The recreant's brave resolves which came to nothing. The indignant question of our text is, as it were, framed between two clauses which contrast Reuben's indolent holding aloof with his valorous resolves. 'By the watercourses of Reuben there were great resolves of heart.' . . . 'At the watercourses of

Reuben there were great searchings of heart.' Resolves came first, but they were not immediately acted on, and as the Reubenites sate among the sheepfolds and felt the charm of their peaceful lives, the 'native hue of resolution was sicklied o'er,' and doubts of the wisdom of their gallant determination crept in, and their valour oozed out. And so for all their fine resolves, they had no share in the fight nor in the triumph.

So let us lay the warning of that example to heart, and if we are stirred by noble impulses to take our place in the ranks of the fighters for God, let us act on these at once. Emotions evaporate very soon if they are not used to drive the wheels of conduct. The Psalmist was wise who 'delayed not, but made haste and delayed not to keep God's commandments.' Many a man has over and over again resolved to serve God in some specific fashion, and to enlist in the 'effective force' of Christ's army, and has died without ever having done it.

IV. The question in the hour of victory. 'Why?'

Deborah asks it with vehement contempt.

That victory is certain. Are *you* to have part in it?

The question will be asked on the judgment day by Christ, and by our own consciences. 'And he was speechless.'

To be neutral is to be on the side of the enemy, against whom the 'stars fight,' and whom Kishon sweeps away.

'Who is on the Lord's side?'—Who?

‘ALL THINGS ARE YOURS’

‘They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.’—
JUDGES v. 20.

‘For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.’—JOB v. 23.

THESE two poetical fragments present the same truth on opposite sides. The first of them comes from Deborah’s triumphant chant. The singer identifies God with the cause of Israel, and declares that heaven itself fought against those who fought against God’s people. There may be an allusion to the tempest which Jewish tradition tells us burst over the ranks of the enemy, or there may be some trace of ancient astrological notions, or the words may simply be an elevated way of saying that Heaven fought for Israel. The silent stars, as they swept on their paths through the sky, advanced like an avenging host embattled against the foes of Israel and of God. All things fight against the man who fights against God.

The other text gives the other side of the same truth. One of Job’s friends is rubbing salt into his wounds by insisting on the commonplace, which needs a great many explanations and limitations before it can be accepted as true, that sin is the cause of sorrow, and that righteousness brings happiness; and in the course of trying to establish this heartless thesis to a heavy heart he breaks into a strain of the loftiest poetry in describing the blessedness of the righteous. All things, animate and inanimate, are upon his side. The ground, which Genesis tells us is ‘cursed for his sake,’ becomes his ally, and the very creatures whom man’s sin set at enmity against him are at peace with him. All things

are the friends and servants of him who is the friend and servant of God.

I. So, putting these two texts together, we have first the great conviction to which religion clings, that God being on our side all things are for us, and not against us.

Now, that is the standing faith of the Old Testament, which no doubt was more easily held in those days, because, if we accept its teaching, we shall recognise that Israel lived under a system in so far supernatural as that moral goodness and material prosperity were a great deal more closely and indissolubly connected than they are to-day. So, many a psalmist and many a prophet breaks out into apostrophes, warranted by the whole history of Israel, and declaring how blessed are the men who, apart from all other defences and sources of prosperity, have God for their help and Him for their hope.

But we are not to dismiss this conviction as belonging only to a system where the supernatural comes in, as it does in the Old Testament history, and as antiquated under a dispensation such as that in which we live. For the New Testament is not a whit behind the Old in insisting upon this truth. 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' 'Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?' The New Testament is committed to the same conviction as that to which the faith of Old Testament saints clung as the sheet anchor of their lives.

That conviction cannot be struck out of the creed of any man, who believes in the God to whom the Old and the New Testament alike bear witness. For it rests upon this plain principle, that all this great universe

is not a chaos, but a cosmos, that all these forces and creatures are not a rabble, but an ordered host.

What is the meaning of that great Name by which, from of old, God in His relations to the whole universe has been described—the 'Lord of Hosts'? Who are the 'hosts' of which He is 'the Lord,' and to whom, as the centurion said, He says to this one, 'Go!' and he goeth; and to another, 'Come!' and he cometh; and to another, 'Do this!' and he doeth it? Who are 'the hosts'? Not only these beings who are dimly revealed to us as rational and intelligent, who 'excel in strength,' because they 'hearken to the voice of His word,' but in the ranks of that great army are also embattled all the forces of the universe, and all things living or dead. 'All are Thy servants; they continue this day'—angels, stars, creatures of earth—'according to Thine ordinances.'

And if it be true that the All is an ordered whole, which is obedient to the touch and to the will of that divine Commander, then all His servants must be on the same side, and cannot turn their arms against each other. As an old hymn says with another reference—

' All the servants of our King
In heaven and earth are one,'

and none of them can injure, wound, or slay a fellow-servant. If all are travelling in the same direction there can be no collision. If all are enlisted under the same standard they can never turn their weapons against each other. If God sways all things, then all things which God sways must be on the side of the men that are on the side of God. 'Thou shalt make a league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.'

II. Note the difficulties arising from experience, in the way of holding fast by this conviction of faith.

The grim facts of the world, seen from their lowest level, seem to shatter it to atoms. Talk about 'the stars in their courses fighting' for or against anybody! In one aspect it is superstition, in another aspect it is a dream and an illusion. The prose truth is that they shine down silent, pitiless, cold, indifferent, on battle-fields or on peaceful homes; and the moonlight is as pure when it falls upon broken hearts as when it falls upon glad ones. Nature is utterly indifferent to the moral or the religious character of its victims. It goes on its way unswerving and pitiless; and whether the man who stands in its path is good or bad matters not. If he gets into a typhoon he will be wrecked; if he tumbles over Niagara he will be drowned. And what becomes of all the talk about an embattled universe on the side of goodness, in the face of the plain facts of life—of nature's indifference, nature's cruelty which has led some men to believe in two sovereign powers, one beneficent and one malicious, and has led others to say, 'God is a superfluous hypothesis, and to believe in Him brings more enigmas than it solves,' and has led still others to say, 'Why, if there *is* a God, does it look as if either He was not all-powerful, or was not all-merciful?' Nature has but ambiguous evidence to give in support of this conviction.

Then, if we turn to what we call Providence and its mysteries, the very book of Job, from which my second text is taken, is one of the earliest attempts to grapple with the difficulty and to untie the knot; and I suppose everybody will admit that, whatever may be the solution which is suggested by that enigmatical book, the

solution is by no means a complete one, though it is as complete as the state of religious knowledge at the time at which the book was written made possible to be attained. The seventy-third psalm shows that even in that old time when, as I have said, supernatural sanctions were introduced into the ordinary dealings of life, the difficulties that cropped up were great enough to bring a devout heart to a stand, and to make the Psalmist say, 'My feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped.' Providence, with all its depths and mysteries, often to our aching hearts seems in our own lives to contradict the conviction, and when we look out over the sadness of humanity, still more does it seem impossible for us to hold fast by the faith 'that all which we behold is full of blessings.'

I doubt not that there are many of ourselves whose lives, shadowed, darkened, hemmed in, perplexed, or made solitary for ever, seem to them to be hard to reconcile with this cheerful faith upon which I am trying to insist. Brethren, cling to it even in the darkness. Be sure of this, that amongst all our mercies there are none more truly merciful than those which come to us shrouded in dark garments, and in questionable shapes. Let nothing rob us of the confidence that 'all things work together for good.'

III. I come, lastly, to consider the higher form in which this conviction is true for ever.

I have said that the facts of life seem often to us, and are felt often by some of us, to shatter it to atoms; to riddle it through and through with shot. But, if we bring the Pattern-life to bear upon the illumination of all life, and if we learn the lessons of the Cradle and the Cross, and rise to the view of human life which

emerges from the example of Jesus Christ, then we get back the old conviction, transfigured indeed, but firmer than ever. We have to alter the point of view. Everything always depends on the point of view. We have to alter one or two definitions. Definitions come first in geometry and in everything else. Get *them* right, and you will get your theorems and problems right.

So, looking at life in the light of Christ, we have to give new contents to the two words 'good' and 'evil,' and a new meaning to the two words 'for' and 'against.' And when we do that, then the difficulties straighten themselves out, and there are not any more knots, but all is plain; and the old faith of the Old Testament, which reposed very largely upon abnormal and extraordinary conditions of life, comes back in a still nobler form, as possible to be held by us amidst the commonplace of our daily existence.

For everything is my friend, is for me and not against me, that helps me nearer to God. To live for Him, to live with Him, to be conscious ever of communion with Himself, to feel the touch of His hand on my hand, and the pressure of His breast against mine, at all moments of my life, is my true and the highest good. And if it is true that the 'river of the water of life' which 'flows from the Throne of God' is the only draught that can ever satisfy the immortal thirst of a soul, then whatever drives me away from the cisterns and to the fountain, is on my side. Better to dwell in a 'dry and thirsty land, where no water is,' if it makes me long for the water that rises at the gate of the true Bethlehem—the house of bread—than to dwell in a land flowing with milk and honey, and well watered in every part! If the cup that I would fain lift to my lips has poison in it, or if its sweetness is making me lose my relish for

the pure and tasteless river that flows from the Throne of God, there can be no truer friend than that calamity, as men call it, which strikes the cup from my hands, and shivers the glass before I have raised it to my lips. Everything is my friend that helps me towards God.

Everything is my friend that leads me to submission and obedience. The joy of life, and the perfection of human nature, is an absolutely submitted will, identified with the divine, both in regard to doing and to enduring. And whatever tends to make my will flexible, so that it corresponds to all the sinuosities, so to speak, of the divine will, and fits into all its bends and turns, is a blessing to me. Raw hides, stiff with dirt and blood, are put into a bath of bitter infusion of oak-bark. What for? For the same end as, when they are taken out, they are scraped with sharp steels,—that they may become flexible. When that is done the useless hide is worth something.

‘Our wills are ours, we know not how ;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.’

And whatever helps me to that is my friend.

Everything is a friend to the man that loves God, in a far sweeter and deeper sense than it can ever be to any other. Like a sudden burst of sunshine upon a gloomy landscape, the light of union with God and friendship with Him flooding my daily life flashes it all up into brightness. The dark ribbon of the river that went creeping through the black copses, when the sun glints upon it, gleams up into links of silver, and the trees by its bank blaze out into green and gold. Brethren! ‘Who follows pleasure follows pain’; who follows God finds pleasure following him. There can be no surer way to set the world against me than to

try to make it for me, and to make it my all. They tell us that if you want to count those stars that 'like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid' make up the Pleiades, the surest way to see the greatest number of them is to look a little on one side of them. Look away from the joys and friendships of creatural things right up to God, and you will see these sparkling and dancing in the skies, as you never see them when you gaze at them only. Make them second and they are good and on your side. Make them first, and they will turn to be your enemies and fight against you.

This conviction will be established still more irrefragably and wonderfully in that future. Nothing lasts but goodness. 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' To oppose it is like stretching a piece of pack-thread across the rails before the express comes; or putting up some thin wooden partition on the beach on one of the Western Hebrides, exposed to the whole roll of the Atlantic, which will be battered into ruin by the first winter's storm. Such is the end of all those who set themselves against God.

But there comes a future in which, as dim hints tell us, these texts of ours shall receive a fulfilment beyond that realised in the present condition of things. 'Then comes the statelier Eden back to man,' and in a renewed and redeemed earth 'they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain'; and the ancient story will be repeated in higher form. The servants shall be like the Lord who, when He had conquered temptation, 'was with the wild beasts' that forgot their enmity, and 'angels ministered unto Him.' That scene in the desert may serve as a prophecy of the future when, under conditions of which we know nothing, all God's servants shall, even more markedly and manifestly than here,

help each other; and every man that loves God will find a friend in every creature.

If we take Him for our Commander, and enlist ourselves in that embattled host, then all weathers will be good; 'stormy winds, fulfilling His word,' will blow us to our port; 'the wilderness will rejoice and blossom as the rose'; and the whole universe will be radiant with the light of His presence, and ringing with the music of His voice. But if we elect to join the other army—for there is another army, and men have wills that enable them to lift themselves up against God, the Ruler of all things—then the old story, from which my first text is taken, will fulfil itself again in regard to us—'the stars in their courses will fight against' us; and Sisera, lying stiff and stark, with Jael's tent-peg through his temples, and the swollen corpses being swirled down to the stormy sea by 'that ancient river, the river Kishon,' will be a grim parable of the end of the men that set themselves against God, and so have the universe against them. 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.'

LOVE MAKES SUNS

'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.'

JUDGES v. 31

THESE are the closing words of Deborah, the great warrior-prophetess of Israel. They are in singular contrast with the tone of fierce enthusiasm for battle which throbs through the rest of the chant, and with its stern approval of the deed of Jael when she slew Sisera. Here, in its last notes, we have an anticipation

of the highest and best truths of the Gospel. 'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.' If we think of the singer, of the age and the occasion of the song, such purely spiritual, lofty words must seem very remarkable.

I. Note, then, first of all, how here we have a penetrating insight into the essence of religion.

This woman had been nourished upon a more or less perfect edition of what we know as the 'Mosaic Law.' Her faith had been fed by forms. She moved amidst a world full of the cruelties and dark conceptions of a mysterious divine power which torture heathenism apart from Christianity. She had forced her way through all that, and laid hold of the vital centre. And there, away out amidst cruelty and murder, amidst the unutterable abominations and terrors of heathenism, in the centre of a rigid system of ceremonial and retaliation, the woman's heart spoke out, and taught her what was the great commandment. Prophetess she was, fighter she was, she could burst into triumphant approval of Jael's bloody deed; and yet with the same lips could speak this profound word. She had learned that 'Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind,' summed up all duty, and was the beginning of all good in man. That precept found an echo in her heart. Whatever part in her religious development may have been played by the externalisms of ceremonial, she had pierced to the core of religion. Advanced modern critics admit the antiquity of Deborah's song, and this closing stanza witnesses to the existence, at that early period, of a highly spiritual conception of the bond between God and man. Deborah had got as far, in a moment of exaltation and insight,

as the teaching of the Apostle John, although her thought was strangely blended with the fierceness of the times in which she lived. Her approval of Jael's deed by no means warrants our approving it, but we may thankfully see that though she felt the fierce throbbing of desire for vengeance, she also felt this—'Them that *love* Him; that is the Alpha and the Omega of all.'

Our love must depend on our knowledge. Deborah's knowledge was a mere skeleton outline as compared with ours. Contrast the fervour of emotional affection that manifestly throbbed in her heart with the poor, cold pulsations which we dignify by the name of love, and the contrast may put us to shame. There is a religion of fear which dominates hundreds of professing Christians in this land of ours. There is a religion of duty, in which there is no delight, which has many adherents amongst us. There is a religion of form, which contents itself with the externals of Christianity, and that is the religion of many men and women in all our churches. And I may further say, there is a religion of faith, in its narrower and imperfect sense, which lays hold of and believes a body of Christian truth, and has never passed through faith into love. Not he who 'believes that God is,' and comes to Him with formal service and an alienated or negligent heart; not he who recognises the duty of worship, and discharges it because his conscience pricks him, but has no buoyancy within bearing him upwards towards the object of his love; not he who cowers before the dark shadow which some call God; but he who, knowing, trusts, and who, knowing and trusting 'the love which God hath to us,' pulses back the throbs of a recipient heart, and loves Him in return—he, and he only, is a

worshipper. Let us learn the lesson that Deborah learnt below the palm-trees of Lapidoth, and if we want to understand what a religious man is, recognise that he is a man who loves God.

II. Further, note the grand conception of the character which such a love produces.

‘Let them be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.’ Think of the fierce Eastern sun, with ‘sunbeams like swords,’ that springs up from the East, and rushes to the zenith, and ‘nothing is hid from the heat thereof’—a sun the like of which we, in our cloudy skies, never see nor feel, but which, to the Oriental, is the very emblem of splendour and of continuous, victorious power. There are two things here, radiance and energy, light and might.

‘As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength.’ Deborah was a ‘prophetess,’ and people say, ‘What did she prophesy?’ Well, she prophesied the heart of religion—as I have tried to show—in reference to its essence, and, as one sees by this phrase, in reference to its effects. What is her word but a partial anticipation of Christ’s saying, ‘Ye are the light of the world’; and of His disciple’s utterance, ‘Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light’?

It is too plain to need any talking about, that the direct tendency of what we venture to call love to God, meaning thereby the turning of the whole nature to Him, in aspiration, admiration, longing for likeness, and practical imitation, is to elevate, ennoble, and illuminate the whole character. It was said about one woman that ‘to love her was an education.’ That was exaggeration; but it is below the truth about God. The true way to refine and elevate and educate is to

cultivate love to God. And when we get near to Him, and hold by Him, and are continually occupied with Him; when our being is one continual aspiration after union with Him, and we experience the glow and rapture included in the simple word 'love,' then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him.

That is what Paul meant when he said, 'Now are ye light in the Lord.' Union with Him illuminates. The true radiance of saintly character will come in the measure in which we are in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Deborah's astronomy was not her strong point. The sun shines by its own light. We are planets, and are darkness in ourselves, and it is only the reflection of the central sun that ever makes us look silvery white and radiant before men. But though it be derived, it is none the less our light, if it has passed into us, as it surely will, and if it streams out from us, as it no less surely will, in the measure in which love to God dominates our whole lives.

If that is so, dear brethren, is not the shortest and the surest way to have our faces shining like that of Moses when he came down from the mountain, or like Stephen's when he 'saw the heavens opened,' to keep near Jesus Christ? It is slow work to hammer bits of ore out of the rock with a chisel and a mallet. Throw the whole mass into the furnace, and the metal will come out separated from the dross. Get up the heat, and the light, which is the consequence of the heat, will take care of itself. 'In the Lord' ye shall be 'light.'

Is Deborah's aspiration fulfilled about me? Let each of us ask that. 'As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength'—would anybody say that about my Christian character? Why not? Only because the

springs have run low within is the stream low through the meadows. Only because the love is cold is the light feeble.

There is another thought here. There is power in sunlight as well as radiance. On that truth the prophetess especially lays a finger; 'as the sun when he goeth forth in his *strength*.' She did not know what we know, that solar energy is the source of all energy on this earth, and that, just as in the deepest spiritual analysis 'there is no power but of God,' so in the material region we may say that the only force is the force of the sun, which not only stimulates vegetation and brings light and warmth—as the pre-scientific prophetess knew—but in a hundred other ways, unknown to her and known to modern science, is the author of all change, the parent of all life, and the reservoir of all energy.

So we come to this thought: The true love of God is no weak, sentimental thing, such as narrow and sectional piety has often represented it to be, but it is a power which will invigorate the whole of a man, and make him strong and manly as well as gentle and gracious; being, indeed, the parent of all the so-called heroic and of all the so-called saintly virtues.

The sun 'goeth forth in his strength,' rushing through the heavens to the zenith. As one of the other editions of this metaphor in the Old Testament has it, 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more until the noontide of the day.' That light, indeed, declines, but that fact does not come into view in the metaphor of the progressive growth towards perfection of the man in whom is the all-conquering might of the true love of Jesus Christ.

Note the context of these words of our text, which,

I said, presents so singular a contrast to them. It is a strange thing that so fierce a battle-chant should at the end settle down into such a sweet swan-song as this. It is a strange thing that in the same soul there should throb the delight in battle and almost the delight in murder, and these lofty thoughts. But let us learn the lesson that true love to God means hearty hatred of God's enemy, and that it will always have to be militant and sometimes stern and what people call fierce. Amidst the amenities and sentimentalities of modern life there is much necessity for remembering that the Apostle of love was a 'son of thunder,' and that it was the lips which summoned Israel to the fight, and chanted hymns of triumph over the corpses borne down by the rushing Kishon, which also said: 'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he shineth forth in his strength.' If you love God, you will surely be a strong man as well as an emotional and affectionate Christian.

That energy is to be continuous and progressive. The sun that Deborah saw day by day spring from his station in the east, and climb to his height in the heavens, and ray down his beams, has been doing that for millions of years, and it will probably keep doing it for uncounted periods still. And so the Christian man, with continuity unbroken and progressive brilliance and power, should shine 'more and more till the unsetting noontide of the day.'

III. That brings me to the last thought, which passes beyond the limits of the prophetess' vision. Here is a prophecy of which the utterer was unaware.

There is a contrast drawn in the words of our text and in those immediately preceding. 'So,' says Deborah, after the fierce description of the slaughter of Sisera—

‘So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord! but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he shineth in his strength.’ She contrasts the transiency of the lives that pit themselves against God with the perpetuity that belongs to those which are in harmony with Him. The truth goes further than she probably knew; certainly further than she was thinking when she chanted these words. Let us widen them by other words which use the same metaphor, and say, ‘they that be wise’—that is a shallower word than ‘them that love Thee’—‘they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.’ Let us widen and deepen them by sacred words still; for Jesus Christ laid hold of this old metaphor, and said, describing the time when all the enemies shall have perished, and the weeds have been flung out of the vineyard, ‘Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father,’ with a brilliancy that will fill heaven with new splendours, bright beyond all that we see here amidst the thick atmosphere and mists and clouds of the present life!

Nor need we stop even there, for Jesus Christ not only laid hold of this metaphor in order to describe the eternal glory of the children of the Kingdom, but at the last time that human eyes on earth saw Him, the glorified Man Christ Jesus is thus described: ‘His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.’ Love always tends to likeness; and love to Christ will bring conformity with Him. The perfect love of heaven will issue in perfect and perpetual assimilation to Him. Science tells us that the light of the sun probably comes from its contraction; and that that process of contraction will go on until, at some point within the

bounds of time, though far beyond the measure of our calculations, the sun himself shall die, the ineffectual beams will be paled, and there will be a black orb, with neither life nor light nor power. And then, then, and after that for ever, 'they that love Him' shall continue to be as that dead sun once was, when he went forth in his hot might.

GIDEON'S ALTAR

'Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom [God is peace].'—JUDGES vi. 24.

I NEED not tell over again, less vividly, the picturesque story in this chapter, of the simple husbandman up in the hills, engaged furtively in threshing out a little wheat in some hollow in the rock where he might hide it from the keen eyes of the oppressors; and of how the angel of the Lord, unrecognised at first, appeared to him; and gradually there dawned upon his mind the suspicion of who He was who spoke. Then follow the offering, the discovery by fire, the shrinking of the man from contact with the divine, the wonderfully tranquillising and condescending assurance, cast into the form of the ordinary salutation of domestic life: 'And the Lord said unto him Peace be unto thee!'—as any man might have said to any other—'fear not! thou shalt not die.' Then Gideon piles up the unhewn stones on the hillside into a rude altar, apparently not for the purpose of offering sacrifice, but for a monument, to which is given this strange name, strange upon such warrior lips, and strange in contemplation of the fierce conflict into which he was immediately to plunge, 'the Lord is peace.'

Now I think that this name, imposed for such a reason and under such circumstances, may teach us a good many things.

I. The first thing that it seems to me to suggest is the great discovery which this man had made, and in the rapture of which he named his altar,—that the sight of God is *not* death, but life and peace.

Gideon was a plain, rude man, with no very deep religious experience. Apparently up to the moment of this vision he had been contentedly tolerating the idolatrous practices which had spread over all the country. He had heard of 'Jehovah.' It was a name, a tradition, which his fathers had told him. That was all that he knew of the God of Israel. Into this hearsay religion, as in a flash, while Gideon is busy about his threshing floor, thinking of his wheat or of the misery of his nation, there comes, all at once, this crushing conviction,—'the *hearsay* God is beside you, speaking to you! You have personal relations to Him, He is nearer you than any human being is, He is no mere Name, here He stands!'

And whenever the lightning edge of a conviction like that cuts its way through the formalisms and traditionalisms and hearsay repetitions of conventional religion, then there comes what came to Gideon, the swift thought, 'And if this be true, if I really do touch, and am touched by, that living Person whose name is Jehovah, what is to become of me? Shall I not shrivel up when His fiery finger is laid upon me? I have seen Him face to face, and I must die.'

I believe that, in the case of the vast majority of men, the first living, real apprehension of a real, living God is accompanied with a shock, and has mingled with it something of awe, and even of terror. Were

there no sin there would be no fear, and pure hearts would open in silent blessedness and yield their sweetest fragrance of love and adoration, when shone on by Him, as flowers do to the kiss of the sunbeams. But, taking into account the sad and universal fact of sin, it is inevitable that men should shrink from the Light which reveals their evil, and that the consciousness of God's presence should strike a chill. It is sad that it should be so. But it is sadder still when it is not so, but when, as is sometimes the case, the sight of God produces no sense of sin, and no consciousness of discord, or foreboding of judgment. For, only through that valley of the shadow of death lies the path to the happy confidence of peace with God, and unless there has been trembling at the beginning, there will be no firm and reasonable trust afterwards.

For Gideon's terror opened the way for the gracious proclamation, which would have been needless but for it—'Peace be unto thee; fear not, thou shalt not die.'

The sight of God passes from being a fear to a joy, from being a fountain of death to a spring of life. Terror is turned to tranquil trust. The narrow and rough path of conscious unworthiness leads to the large place of happy peace. The divine word fits Gideon's condition, and corresponds to his then deepest necessity; and so he drinks it in as the thirsty ground drinks in the water; and in the rapture of the discovery that the Name, that had come down from his fathers to him, was the Name of a real Person, with whom he stood in real relationships, and those of simple friendship and pure amity, he piles up the rough stones of the place, and makes the name of his altar the echo of the divine voice. It is as if he had said with rapture of surprise, 'Then Jehovah *is* peace; which I never dreamed of before.'

Dear friends, do you know anything of such an experience? Can you build your altar, and give it this same name? Can you write upon the memorial of your experiences, 'The Lord is my peace'? Have you passed from hearsay into personal contact? Can you say, 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee'? Do you know the further experience expressed in the subsequent words of the same quotation: 'Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'? And have you passed out of that stormy ocean of terror and self-condemnation into the quiet haven of trust in Him in whom we have peace with God, where your little boat lies quiet, moored for ever to the Rock of Ages, to 'Jehovah, who is Peace'?

In connection with this rapturous discovery, and to Gideon strange new thought, we may gather the lesson that peace with God will give peace in all the soul. The 'peace with God' will pass into a wider thing, the 'peace of God.' There is tranquillity in trust. There is rest in submission. There is repose in satisfied desires. When we live near Him, and have ceased from our own works, and let Him take control of us and direct us in all our ways, then the storms abate. The things that disturb us are by no means so much external as inward; and there is a charm and a fascination in the thought, 'the Lord is peace,' which stills the inward tempest, and makes us quiet, waiting upon His will and drawing in His grace. The secret of rest is to cease from self, from self as guide, from self as aim, from self as safety. And when self-will is cast out, and self-dependence is overcome, and self-reliance is sublimed into hanging upon God's hand, and when He, not mine own inclination, is my Director, and the

Arbiter of my fate, then all the fever of unrest is swept wholly out of my heart, and there is nothing left in it on which the gnawing tooth of anxiety or of care can prey. God being my peace, and I yielding myself to Him, 'in quietness and confidence' is my 'strength.' 'Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.'

II. We may look upon this inscription from another point of view, as suggesting the thought that God's peace is the best preparation for, and may be experienced in the midst of, the intensest conflict.

Remember what the purpose of this vision was,—to raise up a man to fight an almost desperate fight, no metaphorical war, but one with real sharp swords, against real strong enemies. The first blow in the campaign was to be struck that night. Gideon was being summoned by the vision, to long years of hardship and bitter warfare, and his preparation for the conflict consisted largely in the revelation to his inmost spirit that 'Jehovah is peace.' We might rather have looked for a manifestation of the divine nature as ready to go forth to battle with the raw levies of timid peasants. We should have expected the thought which inspired their captain to have been 'The Lord is a man of war,' rather than 'The Lord is peace.' But it is not so—and therein lies the deep truth that the peace of God is the best preparation for strife. It gives courage, it leaves the heart at leisure to fling all its power into the conflict, it inspires with the consciousness of a divine ally. As Paul puts it, in his picture of the fully-armed Christian soldier, the feet are 'shod with the preparedness of alacrity which is produced by the gospel of peace.' That will make us 'ready, aye ready' for the roughest march, and enable us to stand firm

against the most violent charges of the enemy. There is no such preparation for the conflict of life, whether it be waged against our own inward evil, or against opposing forces without, as to have deep within the soul the settled and substantial peace of God. If we are to come out of the battle with victory sitting on our helmets, we must go into it with the Dove of God brooding in our hearts. As the Lord said to Gideon, 'Go in *this* thy might, and thou shalt save Israel, . . . have not I sent thee?'

But, besides this thought that the knowledge of Jehovah as peace fits us for strife, that hastily-reared altar with its seemingly inappropriate name, may remind us that it is possible, in the midst of the deadliest hand-to-hand grip with evil, and whilst fighting the 'good fight of faith' with the most entire self-surrender to the divine will, to bear within us, deeper than all the surface strife, that inward tranquillity which knows no disturbance, though the outward life is agitated by fierce storms. Deep in the centre of the ocean the waters lie quiet, though the wildest tempests are raging above, and the fiercest currents running. Over the tortured and plunging waters of the cataract there lies unmoving, though its particles are in perpetual flux, the bow of promise and of peace. So over all the rush and thunder of life there may stretch, radiant and many-coloured, and dyed with beauty by the very sun himself, the abiding bow of beauty, the emblem and the reality of the divine tranquillity. The Christian life is continual warfare, but in it all, 'the peace of God which passeth understanding' may 'garrison our hearts and minds.' In the inmost keep of the castle, though the storm of war may be breaking against the walls, there will be a quiet chamber where no noise of the

archers can penetrate, and the shouts of the fight are never heard. Let us seek to live in the 'secret place of the Most High'; and in still communion with Him, keep our inmost souls in quiet, while we bravely front difficulties and enemies. You are to be God's warriors; see to it that on every battlefield there stands the altar 'Jehovah Shalom.'

III. Lastly, we may draw yet another lesson, and say that that altar, with its significant inscription, expressed the aim of the conflict and the hope which sustains in the fight.

Gideon was fighting for peace, and what he desired was that victory should bring tranquillity. The hope which beckoned him on, when he flung himself into his else desperate enterprise, was that God would so prosper his work that the swords might be beaten into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning hooks. Which things may stand as an allegory, and suggest to us that the Christian warfare, whilst it rests upon, and is prompted by, the revelation of God who is peace, aims in all its blows, at the conquering of that sure and settled peace which shall be broken by no rebellious outbursts of self-will, nor by any risings of passions and desires. The aim of our warfare should ever be that the peace of God may be throned in our hearts, and sit there a gentle queen. The true tranquillity of the blessed life is the prize of conflict. David, 'the man of war from his youth,' prepares the throne for Solomon, in whose reign no alarms of war are heard. If you would enter into peace, you must fight your way to it, and every step of the road must be a battle. The land of peace is won by the good fight of faith.

But Gideon's altar not only expressed his purpose in his taking up arms, but his confidence of accomplishing

it, based upon the assurance that the Lord would give peace. It was a trophy erected before the fight, and built, not by arrogant presumption or frivolous underestimate of the enemy's strength, but by humble reliance on the power of that Lord who had promised His presence, and had assured triumph. So the hope that named this altar was the hope that war meant victory, and that victory would bring peace. That hope should animate every Christian soldier. Across the dust of the conflict, the fair vision of unbroken and eternal peace should gleam before each of us, and we should renew fainting strength and revive drooping courage by many a wistful gaze.

We may realise that hope in large measure here. But its fulfilment is reserved for the land of peace which we enter by the last conflict with the last enemy.

Every Christian man's gravestone is an altar on which is written 'Our God is peace'; in token that the warrior has passed into the land where 'violence shall no more be heard, wasting, nor destruction within its borders,' but all shall be deep repose, and the unarmed, because unattacked, peace of tranquil communion with, and likeness to, 'Jehovah our Peace.'

So, dear brethren, let us pass from tradition and hearsay into personal intercourse with God, and from shrinking and doubt into the sunshine of the conviction that He is our peace. And then, with His tranquillity in our hearts let us go out, the elect apostles of the peace of God, and fight for Him, after the pattern of the Captain of our salvation, who had to conquer peace through conflict; and was 'first of all King of Righteousness, and *after that* also King of Peace.'

GIDEON'S FLEECE

'Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said.'—JUDGES vi. 37.

THE decisive moment had come when Gideon, with his hastily gathered raw levies, was about to plunge down to the plain to face immensely superior forces trained to warfare. No wonder that the equally untrained leader's heart beat faster. Many a soldier, who will be steadfastly brave in the actual shock of battle, has tremors and throbbings on its eve. Gideon's hand shook a little as he drew his sword.

I. Gideon's request.

His petition for a sign was not the voice of unbelief or of doubt or of presumption, but in it spoke real, though struggling faith, seeking to be confirmed. Therefore it was not regarded by God as a sin. When a 'wicked and adulterous generation asked for a sign,' no sign was given it, but when faith asks for one to help it to grasp God's hand, and to go on His warfare in His strength and as His instrument, it does not ask in vain.

Gideon's prayer was wrapped, as it were, in an enfolding promise, for it is preceded and followed by the quotation of words of the Angel of the Lord who had 'looked on him,' and said, 'Go in this thy might and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee?' Prayers that begin and end with 'as Thou hast spoken' are not likely to be repulsed.

II. God's answer.

God wonderfully allows Gideon to dictate the nature of the sign. He stoops to work it both ways, backwards

and forwards, as it were. First the fleece is to be wet and the ground to be dry, then the fleece is to be dry and the ground wet. Miracle was a necessary accompaniment of revelation in those early days, as picture-books are of childhood. But, though we are far enough from being 'men' in Christ, yet we have not the same need for 'childish things' as Gideon and his contemporaries had. We have Christ and the Spirit, and so have a 'word made more sure' than to require signs. But still it is true that the same gracious willingness to help a tremulous faith, which carries its tremulousness to God in prayer, moves the Father's heart to-day, and that to such petitions the answer is given even before they are offered: 'Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' No sign that eyes can see is given, but inward whispers speak assurance and communicate the assurance which they speak.

III. The meaning of the sign.

Many explanations have been offered. The main point is that the fleece is to be made different from the soil around it. It is to be a proof of God's power to endow with characteristics not derived from, and resulting in qualities unlike, the surroundings.

Gideon had no thought of any significance beyond that. But we may allowably let the Scripture usage of the symbol of dew influence our reading into the symbol a deeper meaning than it bore to him.

God makes the fleece wet with dew, while all the threshing-floor is dry. Dew is the symbol of divine grace, of the silently formed moisture which, coming from no apparent source, freshens by night the wilted plants, and hangs in myriad drops, that twinkle into green and gold as the early sunshine strikes them, on the humblest twig. That grace is plainly not a natural

product nor to be accounted for by environment. The dew of the Spirit, which God and God only, can give, can freshen our worn and drooping souls, can give joy in sorrow, can keep us from being touched by surrounding evils, and from being parched by surrounding drought, can silently 'distil' its supplies of strength according to our need into our else dry hearts.

The wet fleece on the dry ground was not only a revelation of God's power, but may be taken as a pattern of what God's soldiers must ever be. A prophet long after Gideon said: 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord,' bringing to others the grace which they have received that they may diffuse it, and turning the dry and thirsty land where no water is into fertility, and the 'parched ground' into a 'pool.'

We have said that the main point of Gideon's petition was that the fleece should be made unlike the threshing-floor, and that that unlikeness, which could obviously not be naturally brought about, was to be to him the sure token that God was at work to produce it. The strongest demonstration that the Church can give the world of its really being God's Church is its unlikeness to the world. If it is wet with divine dew when all the threshing-floor is dry, and if, when all the floor is drenched with poisonous miasma, it is dry from the diffused and clinging malaria, the world will take knowledge of it, and some souls be set to ask how this unlikeness comes. When Haman has to say: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples . . . and their laws are diverse from those of every people,' he may meditate murder, but 'many from among the people of the land' will join their ranks. Gideon may or may not have thought of the fleece as a

symbol of his little host, but we may learn from it the old lesson, 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.'

'FIT, THOUGH FEW'

'Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. 8. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men. And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.'—JUDGES vii. 1-8.

GIDEON is the noblest of the judges. Courage, constancy, and caution are strongly marked in his character. The youngest son of an obscure family in a small tribe, he humbly shrinks from the task imposed on him,—not from cowardice or indolence, but from conscious weakness. Men who are worthy to do such work as his are never forward to begin it, nor backward in it when they are sure that it is God's will. He began his war against Midian by warring against Baal, whose worship had brought the oppressor. If any thorough deliverance from the misery which departure from God has wrought is to be effected, we must destroy the idols before we

attack the spoilers. Cast out sin, and you cast out sorrow. So he first earns his new name of Jerubbaal ('Let Baal plead'), and is known as Baal's antagonist, before he blows the trumpet of revolt. The name is an omen of victory. The hand that had smitten the idol, and had not been withered, would smite Midian. Therefore that new name is used in this chapter, which tells of the preparations for the fight and its triumphant issue. From his home among the hills, he had sent the fiery cross to the three northern tribes, who had been the mainstay of Deborah's victory, and who now rallied around Gideon to the number of thirty-two thousand. The narrative shows us the two armies confronting each other on the opposite slopes of the valley of Jezreel, where it begins to dip steeply towards the Jordan. Gideon and his men are on the south side of the valley, above the fountain of Harod, or 'Trembling,' apparently so called from the confessed terror which thinned his army. The word 'is afraid,' in verse 3, comes from the same root. On the other side of the glen, not far from the site of the Philistine camp on the day of Saul's last defeat, lay the far-stretching camp of the invaders, outnumbering Israel by four to one. For seven years these Midianite marauders had paralysed Israel, and year by year had swarmed up this valley from the eastern desert, and thence by the great plain had penetrated into every corner of the land, as far south as Gaza, devouring like locusts. It is the same easy route by which, to this day, the Bedouin find their way into Palestine, whenever the weak Turkish Government is a little weaker or more corrupt than usual. Apparently, the Midianites were on their homeward march, laden with spoil, and very contemptuous of the small force across the valley, who, on their part, had not shaken off their terror of

the fierce nomads who had used them as they pleased for seven years.

I. Note, as the first lesson taught here, the divinely appointed disproportion between means and end, and its purpose. Many an Israelite would look across to the long lines of black tents, and think, 'We are too few for our task'; but to God's eye they were too many, and the first necessity was to weed them out. The numbers must be so reduced that the victory shall be unmistakably God's, not theirs. The same sort of procedure, and for the same reason, runs through all God's dealings. It is illustrated in a hundred Scripture instances, and is stated most plainly by Paul in his triumphant eloquence. He revels in telling how foolish, weak, base things, that are *no* things in the world's estimate, have been chosen to cover with shame wise, strong, honoured things, which seem to be somewhat; and he gives the same reason as our lesson does, 'that no flesh should glory in His presence.' Eleven poor men on one side, and all the world on the other, made fearful odds. The more unevenly matched are the respective forces, the more plainly does the victory of the weaker demand for its explanation the intervention of God. The old sneer, that 'Providence is always on the side of the strongest battalions,' is an audacious misreading of history, and is the very opposite of the truth. It is the weak battalions which win in the long run, for the history of every good cause is the same. First, it kindles a fire in the hearts of two or three nobodies, who are burned in earlier times, and laughed at as fools, fanatics, impracticable dreamers, in later ages, but whose convictions grow till, one day, the world wakes up to find that everybody believes them, and then it 'builds the tombs of the prophets.'

Why should God desire that there shall be no mistake as to who wins the battle? The answer may very easily be so given as to make what is really a token of His love become an unlovely and repellent trait in His character. It is not eagerness for praise that moves Him, but longing that men may have the blessedness of recognising His hand fighting for them. It is for Israel's sake that He is so solicitous to deliver them from the delusion of their having won the victory. It is because He loves us, and would fain have us made restful, confident, and strong, in the assurance of His fighting for us, that He takes pains so to order the history of His Church in the world, that it is one long attestation of the omnipotence of weakness when His power flows through it. To say 'Mine own hand hath saved me,' is to lose unspeakable peace and blessing; to say 'Not I, but the grace of God in me,' is to be serene and of good cheer in the face of outnumbering foes, and sure of victory in all conflicts. Therefore God is careful to save us from self-gratulation and self-confidence.

One lesson we may learn from this thinning of the ranks; namely, that we need not be anxious to count heads, when we are sure that we are doing His work, nor even be afraid of being in a minority. Minorities are generally right when they are the apostles of new thoughts, though the minorities which cleave to some old fossil are ordinarily wrong. The prophet and his man were alone and ringed around with enemies, when he said, 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them'; and yet he was right, for the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire. Let us be sure that we are on God's side, and then let us not mind how few are in the ranks with us, nor be afraid, though

the far-extended front of the enemy threatens to curl around our flanks and enclose us. The three hundred heroes had God with them, and that was enough.

II. Note the self-applied test of courage which swept away so much chaff. According to Deuteronomy xx. 8, the standing enactment was that such a proclamation as that in verse 3 should precede every battle. Much difficulty has been raised about the mention of Mount Gilead here, as the only Mount Gilead otherwise mentioned in Scripture lay to the east of Jordan. But perhaps the simplest solution is the true one,—that there was another hilly region so named on the western side. The map of the Palestine Exploration Fund attaches the name to the northern slopes of the western end of Gilboa, where Gideon was now encamped, and that is probably right. Be that as it may, the effect of the proclamation was startling. Two-thirds of the army melted away. No doubt, many who had flocked to Gideon's standard felt their valour oozing out at their finger ends, when they came close to the enemy, and saw their long array across the valley. It must have required some courage to confess being afraid, but the cowards were numerous enough to keep each other in countenance. Two out of three were panic-struck. I wonder if the proportion would be less in Christ's army to-day, if professing Christians were as frank as Gideon's men?

Why were the 'fearful' dismissed? Because fear is contagious; and, in undisciplined armies like Gideon's, panic, once started, spreads swiftly, and becomes frenzied confusion. The same thing is true in the work of the Church to-day. Who that has had much to do with guiding its operations has not groaned over the dead weight of the timid and sluggish souls, who

always see difficulties and never the way to get over them? And who that has had to lead a company of Christian men has not often been ready to wish that he could sound out Gideon's proclamation, and bid the 'fearful and afraid' take away the chilling encumbrance of their presence, and leave him with thinned ranks of trusty men? Cowardice, dressed up as cautious prudence, weakens the efficiency of every regiment in Christ's army.

Another reason for getting rid of the fearful is that fear is the opposite of faith, and that therefore, where it is uppermost, the door by which God's power can enter to strengthen is closed. Not that faith must be free of all admixture of fear, but that it must subdue fear, if a man is to be God's warrior, fighting in His strength. Many a tremor would rock the hearts of the ten thousand who remained, but they so controlled their terror that it did not overcome their faith. We do not need, for our efficiency in Christ's service, complete exemption from fear, but we do need to make the psalmist's resolve ours: 'I will trust, and not be afraid.' Terror shuts the door against the entrance of the grace which makes us conquerors, and so fulfils its own forebodings; faith opens the door, and so fulfils its own confidences.

III. Note the final test. God required but few men, but He required that these should be fit. The first test had sifted out the brave and willing. The liquor was none the less, though so much froth had been blown off. As Thomas Fuller says, there were 'fewer persons, but not fewer men,' after the poltroons had disappeared. The second test, 'a purgatory of water,' as the same wise and witty author calls it, was still more stringent. The dwindled ranks were led down from their camp

on the slopes to the fountain and brook which lay in the valley near the Midianites' camp. Gideon alone seems to have known that a test was to be applied there; but he did not know what it was to be till they reached the spring, and the soldiers did not know that they were determining their fate when they drank. The two ways of drinking clearly indicated a difference in the men. Those who glued their lips to the stream and swilled till they were full, were plainly more self-indulgent, less engrossed with their work, less patient of fatigue and thirst, than those who caught up enough in their curved palms to moisten their lips without stopping in their stride or breaking rank. The former test was self-applied, and consciously so. This is no less self-applied, though unconsciously. God shuts out no man from His army, but men shut themselves out; sometimes knowingly, by avowed disinclination for the warfare, sometimes unknowingly, by self-indulgent habits, which proclaim their unfitness.

The great lesson taught here is that self-restraint in the use of the world's goods is essential to all true Christian warfare. There are two ways of looking at and partaking of these. We may either 'drink for strength' or 'for drunkenness.' Life is to some men first a place for strenuous endeavour, and only secondly a place of refreshment. Such think of duty first and of water afterwards. To them, all the innocent joys and pleasures of the natural life are as brooks by the way, of which Christ's soldier should drink, mainly that he may be re-invigorated for conflict. There are others whose conception of life is a scene of enjoyment, for which work is unfortunately a necessary but disagreeable preliminary. One does not often see such a character in its pure perfection of sensualism; but

plenty of approximations to it are visible, and ugly sights they are. The roots of it are in us all; and it cannot be too strongly insisted on that, unless it be subdued, we cannot enlist in Christ's army, and shall never be counted worthy to be His instruments. Such self-restraint is especially needful to be earnestly inculcated on young men and women, to whom life is opening as if it were a garden of delight, whose passions are strong, whose sense is keen, whose experience is slender, and to whom all earth's joys appeal more strongly than they do to those who have drunk of the cup, and know how bitter is its sediment. It is especially needful to be pealed into the ears of a generation like ours, in which senseless luxury, the result of wealth which has increased faster than the power of rightly using it, has attained such enormous proportions, and is threatening, in commercial communities especially, to drown all noble aspirations, and Spartan simplicity, and Christian self-devotion, in its muddy flood. Surely never was Gideon's test more wanted for the army of the Lord of hosts than it is to-day.

Such self-restraint gives double sweetness to enjoyments, which, when partaken of more freely, pall on the jaded palate. 'The full soul loatheth a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' The senses are kept fine-edged, and the rare holidays are sweeter because they are rare. The most refined prudence of the mere sensualist would prescribe the same regimen as the Christian moralist does. But from how different a motive! Christ calls for self-restraint that we may be fit organs for His power, and bids us endure hardness that we may be good soldiers of His. If we know anything of the true sweetness of

His fellowship and service, it will not be hard to drink sparingly of earthly fountains, when we have the river of His pleasures to drink from; nor will it be painful sacrifice to cast away imitation jewels, in order to clasp in our hands the true riches of His love and imparted life.

A BATTLE WITHOUT A SWORD

'And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. 14. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15. And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise: for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. 16. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. 17. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, that as I do, so shall ye do. 18. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. 19. So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. 20. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. 21. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. 22. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath. 23. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.'—JUDGES vii. 13-23.

To reduce thirty-two thousand to three hundred was a strange way of preparing for a fight; and, no doubt, the handful left felt some sinking of their courage when they looked on their own small number and then on the widespread Midianite host. Gideon, too, would need heartening. So the first thing to be noted is the encouragement given him. God strengthens faith when it needs strengthening, and He has many ways of doing

so. Note that Gideon's visit to the Midianite camp was on 'the same night' on which his little band was left alone after the ordeal by water. How punctually to meet our need, when it begins to be felt, does God's help come! It was by God's command that he undertook the daring adventure of stealing down to the camp. We can fancy how silently he and Phurah crept down the hillside, and, with hushed breath and wary steps, lest they should stumble on and wake some sleeper, or even rouse some tethered camel, picked their way among the tents. But they had God's command and promise, and these make men brave, and turn what would else be foolhardy into prudence. He put his ear to the black camel's-hair wall of one tent, and heard what his faith could not but recognise as God's message to him.

The soldier's dream was just such as such a man would dream in such circumstances. A round loaf of barley (the commonest kind of bread) was dreamed of as rolling down from a height and upsetting '*the* tent.' The use of the definite article seems to point to some particular tent, perhaps simply the one in which the dreamer lay, or perhaps the general's; but the noun may be used as a collective, and what is meant may be that the loaf went through the camp, overturning all the tents in its way. The interpretation needed no Daniel, but the immediate explanation given, shows not only the transparency of the symbol, but the dread in the Midianite ranks of Gideon's prowess. A nameless awe, which goes far to produce the defeat it dreads, was beginning to creep over them. It finds utterance both in the dream and in its translation. The tiny loaf worked effects disproportioned to its size. A rock thundering down the hillside might have

mass and momentum enough to level a line of tents, but one poor loaf to do it! Some mightier than human hand must have set it going on its career. So the soldier interprets that God had delivered the army into Gideon's hand.

This dream suggests two or three considerations. In several instances we find God speaking to those outside Israel by dreams; for example, to Pharaoh and his two officers, Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate's wife. It is the lowest form of divine communication, and, like other lower forms, is not to be looked for when the higher teaching of the Spirit of Christ is open to us all.

Again, while both dream and interpretation might be accounted for on simply natural grounds, a deeper insight into the so-called 'natural' brings us to see it as all penetrated by the operations of the ever-present God. And the coincidences which brought Gideon to just that tent among the thousands along the valley at just the moment when the two startled sleepers were talking, might well strike Gideon, as they did, as being God's own fulfilment of the promise that 'what they say' would strengthen his hands for the attack (v. 11).

Further, Gideon had already had the sign of the fleece and the dew; but God does not disdain to let him have an additional encouragement, and to let him draw confirmation of his own token from the talk of two Midianites. Faith may be buttressed by men's words, albeit its only foundation is God's.

Gideon has a place in the muster-roll of heroes of faith in Hebrews xi., and his whole conduct in this incident proves his right to stand there. 'He worshipped,' for his soul went out in trust to God, whose voice he heard through the two Midianites, and bowed

in thankfulness and submissive obedience. There could be no outward worship there, with an army of sleepers close by, but the silent uplifting of confidence and desire reaches God and strengthens the man. So he went back with new assurance of victory, and roused his sleeping band.

Mark his words as another token of his faith. The Midianite interpreter had said, '*God* has delivered'; Gideon says, '*The Lord* has delivered.' The former name is the more general, and is natural on the lips of a heathen; the latter is the covenant name, and to use it implies reliance on the Jehovah revealed by His acts to Israel. The Midianite had said that the host was delivered into Gideon's hand; he says that it is delivered into the hands of the three hundred, suppressing himself and honouring them. God's soldiers must be willing to 'esteem others better than themselves,' and to fight for God's glory, not their own. The Midianite had said, 'This is . . . the sword of Gideon'; he bid his men cry 'the sword of *the Lord, and* of Gideon.' It was God's cause for which they were contending, not his; and yet it was his, inasmuch as he was God's instrument. 'Excellent mixture,' says Thomas Fuller, 'both joined together; admirable method, God put in the first place. Where divine blessing leads up the van, and man's valour brings up the battle, must not victory needs follow in the rear?'

Gideon does not seem to have been divinely directed to the stratagem by which the Midianites were thrown into panic. He had been promised victory, but that does not lead him to idle waiting for fulfilment of the promise. 'To wait for God's performance in doing nothing is to abuse that divine providence, which will so work that it will not allow us to idle' (*Bishop Hall*).

True faith will wisely adopt means to reach promised ends, and, having used brain and hand as if all depended on ourselves, will look to Him, as if nothing depended on us, but all on Him.

There was strong faith as well as daring and skilful generalship in leading down the three hundred, with no weapons but trumpets and pitchers, to close quarters with an armed enemy so superior in numbers. And did it not need some faith, too, not only in Gideon but in God, on the part of his band, to plunge down the hill on such an errand, each man with both his hands full, and so unable to strike a blow? The other three hundred at Thermopylæ have been wept over and sung; were not these three hundred as true heroes? Let us not count heads when we are called on to take God's side. His soldiers are always in the minority, but, if He is reckoned in, the minority becomes the majority. 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them.'

One can fancy the sleepers starting up dazed by the sudden bray of the trumpets and the wild shout of that war-cry yelled from every side. As they stumbled out of their tents, without leaders, without knowledge of the numbers of their foe, and saw all around the flaring torches, and heard the trumpet-blasts, which seemed to speak of an immense attacking force, no wonder that panic shook them, and they fled. Huge mobs of undisciplined men, as Eastern armies are, and these eminently were, are especially liable to such infectious alarms; and the larger the force, the faster does panic spread, the more unmanageable does the army become, and the more fatal are the results. Each man reflects, and so increases, his neighbour's fear. 'Great armies, once struck with amazement, are like wounded whales.

Give them but line enough, and the fishes will be the fishermen to catch themselves.'

So the host broke up in wild disorder, and hurried in fragments towards the Jordan fords, trampling each other down as they raced through the darkness, and each man, as he ran, dreading to feel the enemy's sword in his back next moment. 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous is bold as a lion.' Thus without stroke of weapon was the victory won. The battle was the Lord's.

And the story is not antiquated in substance, however the form of the contests which God's soldiers have to-day to fight has changed. Still it is true that we shall only wage war aright when we feel that it is His cause for which we contend, and His sword which wins the victory. If Gideon had put himself first in his warcry, or had put his own name only in it, the issue would have been different.

May we not also venture to apply the peculiar accoutrements of the victorious three hundred to ourselves? Christ's men have no weapons to wield but the sounding out from them, as from a trumpet, of the word of the Lord, and the light of a Christian life shining through earthen vessels. If we boldly lift up our voices in the ancient war-cry, and let that word peal forth from us, and flash the light of holy lives on a dark world, we may break the sleeper's slumbers to a glad waking, and win the noblest of victories by leading them to enlist in the army of our Captain, and to become partakers of His conquests by letting Him conquer, and thereby save them.

STRENGTH PROFANED AND LOST

'But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house. 22. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. 23. Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. 24. And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. 25. And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison-house; and he made them sport; and they set him between the pillars. 26. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. 27. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. 28. And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. 29. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. 30. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. 31. Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.'—JUDGES xvi. 21-31.

NOBODY could be less like the ordinary idea of an Old Testament 'saint' than Samson. His gift from 'the spirit of the Lord' was simply physical strength, and it was associated with the defects of his qualities. His passions were strong, and apparently uncontrolled. He had no moral elevation or religious fervour. He led no army against the Philistines, nor seems to have had any fixed design of resisting them. He seeks a wife among them, and is ready to feast and play at riddles with them. When he does attack them, it is because he is stung by personal injuries; and it is only with his own arm that he strikes. His exploits have a mixture of grim humour and fierce hatred quite unlike anything else in Scripture, and

more resembling the horse-play of Homeric or Norse heroes than the stern purpose and righteous wrath of a soldier who felt that he was God's instrument. We seem to hear his loud laughter as he ties the firebrands to the struggling jackals, or swings the jaw-bone. A strange champion for Jehovah! But we must not leave out of sight, in estimating his character, the Nazarite vow, which his parents had made before his birth, and he had endorsed all his life. That supplies the substratum which is lacking. The unshorn hair and the abstinence from wine were the signs of consecration to God, which might often fail of reaching the deepest recesses of the will and spirit, but still was real, and gave the point of contact for the divine gift of strength. Samson's strength depended on his keeping the vow, of which the outward sign was the long, matted locks; and therefore, when he let these be shorn, he voluntarily cast away his dependence on and consecration to God, and his strength ebbed from him. He had broken the conditions on which he received it, and it disappeared. So the story which connects the loss of his long hair with the loss of his superhuman power has a worthy meaning, and puts in a picturesque form an eternal truth.

We see here, first, Samson the prisoner. Milton has caught the spirit of the sad picture in verses 21 and 22, in that wonderful line,

'Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves,'

in which the clauses drop heavily like slow tears, each adding a new touch of woe. The savage manners of the times used the literal forcing out of the eyes from their sockets as the easiest way of reducing

dangerous enemies to harmlessness. Pitiably as the loss was, Samson was better blind than seeing. The lust of the eye had led him astray, and the loss of his sight showed him his sin. Fetters of brass betrayed his jailers' dread of his possibly returning strength; and the menial task to which he was set was meant as a humiliation, in giving him woman's work to do, as if this were all for which the eclipsed hero was now fit. Generous enemies are merciful; the baser sort reveal their former terror by the indignities they offer to their prisoner.

In Samson we see an impersonation of Israel. Like him, the nation was strong so long as it kept the covenant of its God. Like him, it was ever prone to follow after strange loves. Its Delilahs were the gods of the heathen, in whose laps it laid its anointed head, and at whose hands it suffered the loss of its God-given strength; for, like Samson, Israel was weak when it forgot its consecration, and its punishment came from the objects of its infatuated desires. Like him, it was blinded, bound, and reduced to slavery, for all its power was held, as was his, on condition of loyalty to God. His life is as a mirror, in which the nation might see their own history reflected; and the lesson taught by the story of the captive hero, once so strong, and now so weak, is the lesson which Moses taught the nation: 'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things: therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things, and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck' (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48). The blind Samson, chained, at the mill, has

a warning for us, too. That is what God's heroes come to, if once they prostitute the God-given strength to the base loves of self and the flattering world. We are strong only as we keep our hearts clear of lower loves, and lean on God alone. Delilah is most dangerous when honeyed words drop from her lips. The world's praise is more harmful than its censure. Its favours are only meant to draw the secret of our strength from us, that we may be made weak; and nothing gives the Philistines so much pleasure as the sight of God's warriors caught in their toils and robbed of power.

But Samson's misery was Samson's blessedness. The 'howbeit' of verse 22 is more than a compensation for all the wretchedness. The growth of his hair is not there mentioned as a mere natural fact, nor with the superstitious notion that his hair made him strong. God made him strong on condition of his keeping his vow of consecration. The long matted locks were the visible sign that he kept it. Their loss was the consequence of his own voluntary breach of it. So their growth was the visible token that the fault was being repaired. Chastisement wrought sorrow; and in the bondage of the prison he found freedom from the worse chains of sin, and in its darkness felt the dawning of a better light. As Bishop Hall puts it: 'His hair grew together with his repentance, and his strength with his hair.' The cruelties of the Philistines were better for him than their kindness. The world outwits itself when it presses hard on God's deserters, and thus drives them to repent. God mercifully takes care that His wandering children shall not have an easy time of it; and his chastisements, at their sharpest, are calls to us to come back to Him.

Well for those, even if in chains, who know their meaning, and yield to it.

II. We have here Samson,—the occasion of godless triumph. The worst consequence of the fall of a servant of God is that it gives occasion for God's enemies to blaspheme, and reflects discredit on Him, as if He were vanquished. Samson's capture is Dagon's glory. The strife between Philistia and Israel was, in the eyes of both combatants, a struggle between their gods; and so the men of Gaza lit their sacrificial fires and sent up their hymns to their monstrous deity as victor. What would Samson's bitter thoughts be, as the sound of the wild rejoicings reached him in his prison? And is not all this true to-day? If ever some conspicuous Christian champion falls into sin or inconsistency, how the sky is rent with shouts of malicious pleasure! What paragons of virtue worldly men become all at once! How swiftly the conclusion is drawn that all Christians are alike, and none of them any better than the non-Christian world! How much more harm the one flaw does than all the good which a life of service has done! The faults of Christians are the bulwarks of unbelief. 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.' The honour of Christ is a sacred trust, and it is in the keeping of us His followers. Our sins do not only darken our own reputation, but they cloud His. Dagon's worshippers have a right to rejoice when they have Samson safe in their prison, with his eyes out.

III. We have Samson made a buffoon for drunkards. The feasts of heathenism were wild orgies, very unlike the pure joy of the sacrificial meals in Jehovah's worship. Dagon's temple was filled with a drunken

crowd, whose mirth would be made more boisterous by a spice of cruelty. So, a roar of many voices calls for Samson, and this deepest degradation is not spared him. The words employed for 'make sport' seem to require that we should understand that he was not brought out to be the passive object of their gibes and drunken mockery, but was set to play the fool for their delectation. They imply that he had to dance and laugh, while three thousand gaping Philistines, any one of whom would have run for his life if he had been free, fed their hatred by the sight. Perhaps his former reputation for mirth and riddles suggested this new cruelty. Surely there is no more pathetic picture than that of the blind hero, with such thoughts as we know were seething in him, dragged out to make a Philistine holiday, and set to play the clown, while the bitterness of death was in his soul. And this is what God's soldiers come down to, when they forget Him: 'they that wasted us required of us mirth.'

Wearied with his humiliating exertions, the blind captive begs the boy who guided him to let him lean, till he can breathe again, on the pillars that held up the light roof. We need not discuss the probable architecture of Dagon's temple, of which we know nothing. Only we may notice that it is not said that there were only *two* pillars, but rather necessarily implied that there were more than two, for those against which he leaned were 'the two middle' ones. It is quite easy to understand how, if there were a row of them, knocking out the two strongest central ones would bring the whole thing down, especially when there was such a load on the flat roof. Apparently the principal people were in the best places on the

ground floor, sheltered from the sun by the roof, on which the commonalty were clustered, all waiting for what their newly discovered mountebank would do next, after he had breathed himself. The pause was short, and they little dreamed of what was to follow.

IV. We have the last cry and heroic death of Samson. It is not to be supposed that his prayer was audible to the crowd, even if it were spoken aloud. It is not an elevated prayer, but is, like all the rest of his actions at their best, deeply marked with purely personal motives. The loss of his two eyes is uppermost in his mind, and he wants to be revenged for them. Instead of trying to make a lofty hero out of him, it is far better to recognise frankly the limitations of his character and the imperfections of his religion. The distance between him and the New Testament type of God's soldier measures the progress which the revelation of God's will has made, and the debt we owe to the Captain of the host for the perfect example which He has set. The defects and impurity of Samson's zeal, which yet was accepted of God, preach the precious lesson that God does not require virtues beyond the standard of the epoch of revelation at which His servants stand, and that imperfection does not make service unacceptable. If the merely human passion of vengeance throbbed fiercely in Samson's prayer, he had never heard 'Love your enemies'; and, for his epoch, the destruction of the enemies of God and Israel was duty. He was not the only soldier of God who has let personal antagonism blend with his zeal for God; and we have less excuse, if we do it, than he had.

But there is the true core of religion in the prayer. It is penitence which pleads, 'Remember me, O Lord

God!' He knows that his sin has broken the flow of loving divine thought to him, but he asks that the broken current may be renewed. Many a silent tear had fallen from Samson's blind eyes, before that prayer could have come to his lips, as he leaned on the great pillars. Clear recognition of the Source of his strength is in the prayer; if ever he had forgotten, in Delilah's lap, where it came from, he had recovered his conscious dependence amid the misery of the prison. There is humility in the prayer 'Only this once.' He feels that, after such a fall, no more of the brilliant exploits of former days are possible. They who have brought such despite on Jehovah and such honour to Dagon may be forgiven, and even restored to much of their old vigour, but they must not be judges in Israel any more. The best thing left for the penitent Samson is death.

He had been unconscious of the departure of his strength, but he seems to have felt it rushing back into his muscles; so he grasps the two pillars with his mighty hands; the crowd sees that the pause for breath is over, and prepares to watch the new feats. Perhaps we may suppose that his last words were shouted aloud, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' and before they have been rightly taken in by the mob, he sways himself backwards for a moment, and then, with one desperate forward push, brings down the two supports, and the whole thing rushes down to hideous ruin amid shrieks and curses and groans. But Samson lies quiet below the ruins, satisfied to die in such a cause.

He 'counted not his life dear' unto himself, that he might be God's instrument for God's terrible work. The last of the judges teaches us that we too, in a

nobler cause, and for men's life, not their destruction, must be ready to hazard and give our lives for the great Captain, who in His death has slain more of our foes than He did in His life, and has laid it down as the law for all His army, 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.'

How beautifully the quiet close of the story follows the stormy scene of the riotous assembly and the sudden destruction. The Philistines, crushed by this last blow, let the dead hero's kindred search for his body amid the chaos, and bear it reverently up from the plain to the quiet grave among the hills of Dan, where Manoah his father slept. There they lay that mighty frame to rest. It will be troubled no more by fierce passions or degrading chains. Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. The penitent heroism of its end makes us lenient to the flaws in its course; and we leave the last of the judges to sleep in his grave, recognising in him, with all his faults and grossness, a true soldier of God, though in strange garb.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

A GENTLE HEROINE, A GENTILE CONVERT

'And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: 17. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. 18. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. 19. So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? 20. And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? 22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.'—RUTH i. 16-22.

THE lovely idyl of *Ruth* is in sharp contrast with the bloody and turbulent annals of *Judges*. It completes, but does not contradict, these, and happily reminds us of what we are apt to forget in reading such pages, that no times are so wild but that in them are quiet corners, green oases, all the greener for their surroundings, where life glides on in peaceful isolation from the tumult. Men and women love and work and weep and laugh, the gossips of Bethlehem talk over Naomi's return ('they said,' in verse 19, is feminine), Boaz stands among his corn, and no sounds of war disturb them. Thank God! the blackest times were not so dismal in reality as they look in history. There are clefts in the grim rock, and flowers blooming, sheltered in the clefts. The peaceful pictures of this little book, multiplied many thousand times, have to be set as a background to the lurid pictures of the *Book of Judges*.

The text begins in the middle of Naomi's remonstrance with her two daughters-in-law. We need not deal with the former part of the conversation, nor follow Orpah as she goes back to her home and her gods. She is the first in the sad series of those, 'not far from the kingdom of God,' who needed but a little more resolution at the critical moment, and, for want of it, shut themselves out from the covenant, and sank back to a world which they had half renounced.

So these two lonely widows are left, each seeking to sacrifice herself for the other. Who shall decide which was the more noble and truly womanly in her self-forgetfulness,—the elder, sadder heart, which strove to secure for the other some joy and fellowship at the price of its own deepened solitude; or the younger, which steeled itself against entreaties, and cast away friends and country for love's sweet sake? We rightly praise Ruth's vow, but we should not forget Naomi's unselfish pleading to be left to tread her weary path alone.

Ruth's passionate burst of tenderness is immortal. It has put into fitting words for all generations the deepest thoughts of loving hearts, and comes to us over all the centuries between, as warm and living as when it welled up from that gentle, heroic soul. The two strongest emotions of our nature are blended in it, and each gives a portion of its fervour—love and religion. So closely are they interwoven that it is difficult to allot to each its share in the united stream; but, without trying to determine to which of them the greater part of its volume and force is due, and while conscious of the danger of spoiling such words by comments weaker than themselves, we may seek to put into distinct form the impressions which they make.

We see in them the heroism of gentleness. Put the sweet figure of the Moabitess beside the heroes of the *Book of Judges*, and we feel the contrast. But is there anything in its pages more truly heroic than her deed, as she turned her back on the blue hills of Moab, and chose the joyless lot of the widowed companion of a widow aged and poor, in a land of strangers, the enemies of her country and its gods? It is easier far to rush on the spears of the foe, amid the whirl and excitement of battle, than to choose with open eyes so dreary a lifelong path. The gentleness of a true woman covers a courage of the patient, silent sort, which, in its meek steadfastness, is nobler than the contempt of personal danger, which is vulgarly called bravery. It is harder to endure than to strike. The supreme type of heroic, as of all, virtue is Jesus Christ, whose gentleness was the velvet glove on the iron hand of an inflexible will. Of that best kind of heroes there are few brighter examples, even in the annals of the Church which numbers its virgin martyrs by the score, than this sweet figure of Ruth, as the eager vow comes from her young lips, which had already tasted sorrow, and were ready to drink its bitterest cup at the call of duty. She may well teach us to rectify our judgments, and to recognise the quiet heroism of many a modest life of uncomplaining suffering. Her example has a special message to women, and exhorts them to see to it that, in the cultivation of the so-called womanly excellence of gentleness, they do not let it run into weakness, nor, on the other hand, aim at strength, to the loss of meekness. The yielding birch-tree, the 'lady of the woods,' bends in all its elastic branches and tossing ringlets of foliage to the wind; but it stands upright after storms that level oaks and pines. God's strength

is gentle strength, and ours is likest His when it is meek and lowly, like that of the 'strong Son of God.'

Ruth's great words may suggest, too, the surrender which is the natural language of true love. Her story comes in among all these records of bloodshed and hate, like a bit of calm blue sky among piles of ragged thunder-clouds, or a breath of fresh air in the oppressive atmosphere of a slaughter-house. Even in these wild times there was still a quiet corner where love could spread his wings. The question has often been asked, what the purpose of the *Book of Ruth* is, and various answers have been given. The genealogical table at the end, showing David's descent from her, the example which it supplies of the reception of a Gentile into Israel, and other reasons for its presence in Scripture, have been alleged, and, no doubt, correctly. But the Bible is a very human book, just because it is a divine one; and surely it would be no unworthy object to enshrine in its pages a picture of the noble working of that human love which makes so much of human life. The hallowing of the family is a distinct purpose of the Old Testament, and the beautiful example which this narrative gives of the elevating influence of domestic affection entitles it to a place in the canon. How many hearts, since Ruth spoke her vow, have found in it the words that fitted their love best! How often they have been repeated by quivering lips, and heard as music by loving ears! How solemn, and even awful, is that perennial freshness of words which came hot and broken by tears, from lips that have long ago mouldered into dust! What has made them thus 'enduring for ever,' is that they express most purely the self-sacrifice which is essential to all noble love. The very inmost longing of love is to give itself away to the object beloved. It

is not so much a desire to acquire as to bestow, or, rather, the antithesis of giving and receiving melts into one action which has a twofold motion,—one outwards, to give; one inwards, to receive. To love is to give one's self away, therefore all lesser givings are its food and delight; and, when Ruth threw herself on Naomi's withered breast, and sobbed out her passionate resolve, she was speaking the eternal language of love, and claiming Naomi for her own, in the very act of giving herself to Naomi. Human love should be the parent of all self-sacrificing as of all heroic virtues; and in our homes we do not live in love, as we ought, unless it leads us to the daily exercise of self-suppression and surrender, which is not felt to be loss but the natural expression of our love, which it would be a crime against it, and a pain to ourselves, to withhold. If Ruth's temper lived in our families, they would be true 'houses of God' and 'gates of heaven.'

We hear in Ruth's words also that forsaking of all things which is an essential of all true religion. We have said that it was difficult to separate, in the words, the effects of love to Naomi from those of adoption of Naomi's faith. Apparently Ruth's adhesion to the worship of Jehovah was originally due to her love for her mother-in-law. It is in order to be one with her in all things that she says, 'Thy God shall be my God.' And it was because Jehovah was Naomi's God that Ruth chose Him for hers. But whatever the origin of her faith, it was genuine and robust enough to bear the strain of casting Chemosh and the gods of Moab behind her, and setting herself with full purpose of heart to seek the Lord. Abandoning them was digging an impassable gulf between herself and all her past, with its friendships, loves, and habits. She is one of the first,

and not the least noble, of the long series of those who 'suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that they may win' God for their dearest treasure. We have seen how, in her, human love wrought self-sacrifice. But it was not human love alone that did it. The cord that drew her was twisted of two strands, and her love to Naomi melted into her love of Naomi's God. Blessed they who are drawn to the knowledge and love of the fountain of all love in heaven by the sweetness of the characters of His representatives in their homes, and who feel that they have learned to know God by seeing Him in dear ones, whose tenderness has revealed His, and whose gracious words have spoken of His grace! If Ruth teaches us that we must give up all, in order truly to follow the Lord, the way by which she came to her religion may teach us how great are the possibilities, and consequently the duties, of Christians to the members of their own families. If we had more elder women like Naomi, we should have more younger women like Ruth.

The self-sacrifice which is possible and blessed, even to inferior natures, at the bidding of love, is too precious to be squandered on earthly objects. Men's capacities for it, at the call of dear ones here, should be the rebuke of their grudging surrender to God. He gave the capacity that it might find its true field of operation in our relation to Him. But how much more ready we all are to give up everything for the sake of our Naomis than for His sake: and how we may be our own accusers, if the measure of our devotion to them be contrasted with the measure of our devotion to God!

Finally, we may see, in Ruth's entrance into the religion of Israel, a picture of what was intended to be the effect of Israel's relation with the Gentile world.

The household of Elimelech emigrated to Moab in a famine, and, whether that were right or wrong, they were there among heathens as Jehovah worshippers. They were meant to be missionaries, and, in Ruth's case, the purpose was fulfilled. She became the 'first-fruits of the Gentiles'; and one aim of the book, no doubt, is to show how the believing Gentile was to be incorporated into Israel. Boaz rejoices over her, and especially over her conversion, and prays, 'A full reward be given thee of Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.' She is married to him, and becomes the ancestress of David, and, through him, of the Messiah. All this is a beautiful completion to the other side of the picture which the fierce fighting in Judges makes prominent, and teaches that Israel's relation to the nations around was not to be one of mere antagonism, but that they had another mission than destruction, and were set in their land, as the candlestick in the Tabernacle, that light might stream out into the darkness of the desert. The story of the Moabites, whose blood flowed in David's veins, was a standing protest against the later narrow exclusiveness which called Gentiles 'dogs,' and prided itself on outward connection with the nation, in the exact degree in which it lost real union with the nation's God, and real understanding of the nation's mission.

We have left ourselves no space to speak of the remainder of this passage, which is of less importance. It gives us a lively picture of the stir in the little town of Bethlehem, as the two way-worn women came into it, in their strange attire, and attracting notice by travelling alone. As we have observed, 'they said,' in verse 19, is feminine. The women of the village buzzed

round the strangers, as they sat in silence, perhaps by that well at the gate, of which, long after, David longed to drink. Wonder, curiosity, and possibly a spice of malice, mingle in the question, 'Is *this* Naomi?' It is heartless, at any rate; it had been better to have found them food and shelter than to have let them sit, the mark for sharp tongues. Naomi's bitter words seem to be moved partly by a sense of the coldness of the reception. She realises that she has indeed come back to a changed world, where there will be little sympathy except such as Ruth can give. It is with almost passion that she abjures her name 'Pleasant,' as a satire on her woful lot, and bids them call her 'Bitter,' as truer to fact now. The burst of sorrow is natural, as she finds herself again where she had been a wife and mother, and 'remembers happier things.' Her faith wavers, and her words almost reproach God. The exaggerations in which memory is apt to indulge colour them. 'I went out full.' She has forgotten that they 'went out' to seek for bread. She only remembers that four went away, and three sleep in Moab. Possibly she thinks of their emigration as a sin, and traces her dear ones' deaths to God's displeasure on its account. His 'testifying' against her probably means that His providence in bereaving her witnessed to His disapprobation. But, whether that be so or not, her wild words are not those of a patient sufferer, who bows to His will. But true faith may sometimes break down, and Ruth's 'trusting under the wings of Jehovah' is proof enough that, in the long years of lonely sorrow, Naomi's example had shown how peaceful and safe was the shelter there.

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

THE CHILD PROPHET

'And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. 2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; 3. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; 4. That the Lord called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. 5. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. 6. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. 7. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. 8. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. 9. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for Thy servant heareth. 11. And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. 12. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. 13. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. 14. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.'—1 SAMUEL iii. 1-14.

THE opening words of this passage are substantially repeated from 1 Samuel ii. 11, 18. They come as a kind of refrain, contrasting the quiet, continuous growth and holy service of the child Samuel with the black narrative of Eli's riotous sons. While the hereditary priests were plunging into debauchery, and making men turn away from the Tabernacle services, Hannah's son was ministering unto the Lord, and, though no priest, was 'girt with an ephod.' This white flower blossomed on a dunghill. The continuous growth of

a character, from a child serving God, and to old age walking in the same path, is the great lesson which the story of Samuel teaches us. 'The child is father of the man,' and all his long days are 'bound each to each' by true religion. There are two types of experience among God's greatest servants. Paul, made an Apostle from a persecutor, heads the one class. Timothy in the New Testament and Samuel in the Old, represent the other. An Augustine or a Bunyan is made the more earnest, humble, and whole-hearted by the remembrance of a wasted youth and of God's arresting mercy. But there are a serenity and continuity about a life which has grown up in the fear of God that have their own charm and blessing. It is well to have 'much transgression' forgiven, but it may be better to have always been 'innocent' and ignorant of it. Pardon cleanses sin, and even turns the memory of it into an ally of holiness; but traces are left on character, and, at the best, years have been squandered which do not return. Samuel is the pattern of child religion and service, to which teachers should aim that their children may be conformed. How beautifully his double obedience is expressed in the simple words! His service was 'unto the Lord,' and it was 'before Eli'; that is to say, he learned his work from the old man, and in obeying him he served God. The child's religion is largely obedience to human guides, and he serves God best by doing what he is bid,—a lesson needed in our days by both parents and children.

Samuel's peaceful service is contrasted, in the second half of the first verse, with the sad cessation of divine revelations in that dreary time of national laxity. A demoralised priesthood, an alienated people, a silent

God,—these are the outstanding features of the period when this fair life of continuous worship unfolded itself. This flower grew in a desert. The voice of God had become a tradition of the past, not an experience of the present. 'Rare' conveys the idea better than 'precious.' The intention is not to tell the estimate in which the word was held, but the infrequency of its utterance, as appears from the following parallel clause. The fact is mentioned in order to complete the picture of Samuel's 'environment,' to fling into relief against that background his service, and to prepare the way for the narrative of the beginning of an epoch of divine speech. When priests are faithless and people careless, God's voice will often sound from lowly childlike lips. The man who is to be His instrument in carrying on His work will often come from the very centre of the old order, into which he is to breathe new life, and on which he is to impress a new stamp.

The artless description of the night in the Tabernacle is broken by the more general notice of Eli's dim sight, which the Revised Version rightly throws into a parenthesis. It is somewhat marred, too, by the transposition which the Authorised Version, following some more ancient ones, has made, in order to avoid saying, as the Hebrew plainly does, that Samuel slept in the 'Temple of the Lord, where the ark was.' The picture is much more vivid and tender, if we conceive of the dim-eyed old man, lying somewhat apart; of the glimmering light, nearly extinct but still faintly burning; and of the child laid to sleep in the Tabernacle. Surely the picturesque contrast between the sanctity of the ark and the innocent sleep of childhood is meant to strike us, and to serve as connecting the place with the subsequent revelation. Childlike hearts, which

thus quietly rest in the 'secret place of the Most High,' and day and night are near His ark, will not fail of hearing His voice. He sleeps secure who sleeps 'beneath the shadow of the Almighty.' May not these particulars, too, be meant to have some symbolic significance? Night hung over the nation. The spiritual eye of the priest was dim, and the order seemed growing old and decrepit, but the lamp of God had not altogether gone out; and if Eli was growing blind, Samuel was full of fresh young life. The darkest hour is that before the dawn; and that silent sanctuary, with the slumbering old half-blind priest and the expiring lamp, may stand for an emblem of the state of Israel.

The thrice-repeated and misunderstood call may yield lessons of value. We note the familiar form of the call. There is no vision, no symbol of the divine glory, such as other prophets had, but an articulate voice, so human-like that it is thought to be Eli's. Such a kind of call fitted the child's stature best. We note the swift, cheery obedience to what he supposes to be Eli's voice. He sprang up at once, and 'ran to Eli,'—a pretty picture of cheerful service, grudging not his broken sleep, which, no doubt, had often been similarly broken by similar calls. Perhaps it was in order to wait on Eli, quite as much as to tend the lamp or open the gates, that the singular arrangement was made of his sleeping in the Temple; and the reason for the previous parenthesis about Eli's blindness may have been to explain why Samuel slept near him. Where were Eli's sons? They should have been their father's attendants, and the watchers 'by night . . . in the house of the Lord'; but they were away rioting, and the care of both Temple and priest was left to a child.

The old man's heart evidently went out to the boy. How tenderly he bids him lie down again! How affectionately he calls him 'my son,' as if he was already beginning to feel that this was his true successor, and not the blackguards that were breaking his heart! The two were a pair of friends: on the one side were sedulous care and swift obedience by night and by day; on the other were affection and a discernment of coming greatness, made the clearer by the bitter contrast with his own children's lives. The old and the young are good companions for one another, and often understand each other better and help each other more than either does his contemporaries.

Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's, as we all often do. And not less often we make the converse blunder, and mistake Eli's voice for God's. It needs a very attentive ear, and a heart purged from selfishness and self-will, and ready for obedience, to know when God speaks, though men may be His mouthpieces, and when men speak, though they may call themselves His messengers. The child's mistake was venial. It is less pardonable and more dangerous when repeated by us. If we would be guarded against it, we must be continually where Samuel was, and we must not *sleep* in the Temple, but 'watch and be sober.'

Eli's perception that it was God who spoke must have had a pang in it. It is not easy for the old to recognise that the young hear God's voice more clearly than they, nor for the superior to be glad when he is passed over and new truth dawns on the inferior. But, if there were any such feeling, it is silenced with beautiful self-abnegation, and he tells the wondering child the meaning of the voice and the answer he must make. What higher service can any man do to his

fellows, old or young, than to help them to discern God's call and to obey it? What nobler conception of a teacher's work is there than that? Eli heard no voice, from which we may probably conclude that, however real the voice, it was not audible to sense; but he taught Samuel to interpret and answer the voice which he heard, and thus won some share of a prophet's reward.

With what expectation in his young heart Samuel lay down again in his place! This time there is an advance in the form of the call, for only now do we read that the Lord 'came, and stood, and called' as before. A manifestation, addressed to the inward eye, accompanied that to the ear. There is no attempt at describing, nor at softening down, the frank 'anthropomorphism' of the representation, which is the less likely to mislead the more complete it is. Samuel had heard Him before; he sees Him now, and mistake is impossible. But there is no terror nor recoil from the presence. The child's simplicity saves from that, and the child's purity; for his little life had been a growing in service and 'in favour with God and man.'

The answer that came from the child's lips meant far more than the child knew. It is the answer which we are all bound to make. Let us see how deep and wide its scope is. It expresses the entire surrender of the will to the will of God. That is the secret of all peace and nobleness. There is nothing happy or great for man in this world but to love and do God's will. All else is nought. This is solid. 'The world passeth away, . . . but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' Everything besides is show and delusion, and a life directed to it is fleeting as the cloud-wrack that sweeps across the sky, and, whether it is shone on or is

black, is equally melting away. Happy the child who begins with such surrender of self to be God's instrument, and who, like Samuel, can stand up at the end and challenge men's judgment on his course!

The answer vows prompt obedience to yet undisclosed duty. God ever calls His servants to tasks which only by degrees are made known. So Paul in his conversion was bid to go into Damascus, and there learn what more he was to do. We must first put ourselves in God's hands, and then He will lead us round the turn in the road, and show us our work. We get it set for us bit by bit, but the surrender must be entire. The details of His will are revealed as we need them for the moment's guidance. Let us accept them in bulk, and stand to the acceptance in each single case! That is no obedience at all which says, 'Tell me first what you are going to bid me do, and then I will see whether I will do it.' The true spirit of filial submission says, 'I delight to do Thy will; now show me what it is.' It was a strange, long road on which Samuel put his foot when he answered this call, and he little knew where it was to lead him. But the blessing of submission is that we do not need to know. It is enough to see where to put our lifted foot. What comes next we can let God settle.

The answer supplicated further light because of present obedience. 'Speak! for Thy servant heareth,' is a plea never urged in vain. The servant's open ear is a reason for the Lord's open lips. We may be quite sure that, if we are willing to hear, He is more than willing to speak; and anything is possible rather than that His children shall be left, like ill-commanded soldiers on a battlefield, waiting for orders which never come. 'If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know.'

The sad prophecy which is committed to such apparently incongruous lips reiterates a former message by 'a man of God.' Eli was a kindly, and, in his way, good man, but wanting in firmness, and acquiescent in evil, partly, perhaps, from lack of moral courage and partly from lack of fervent religion. He is not charged with faults in his own administration of his office, but with not curbing his disreputable sons. The threatenings are directed, not against himself, but against his 'house,' who are to be removed from the high priestly office. Nothing less than a revolution is foretold. The deposition of Eli's family would shake the whole framework of society. It is to be utterly destroyed, and no sacrifice nor offering can purge it. The ulcer must have eaten deep which required such stern measures for its excision. The sin was mainly the sons'; but the guilt was largely the father's. We may learn how cruel paternal laxity is, and how fatal mischief may be done, by neglect of the plain duty of restraining children. He who tolerates evil which it is his province to suppress, is an accomplice, and the blood of the doers is red on his hands.

It was a terrible message to give to a child; but Samuel's calling was to be the guide of Israel in a period of transition, and he had to be broken early into the work, which needed severity as well as tenderness. Perhaps, too, the stern message was somewhat softened, for the poor old man, by the lips through which it came to him. All that reverent love could do, we may be sure, the young prophet would do, to lighten the heavy tidings. Secrecy would be secured, too; for Samuel, who was so unwilling to tell even Eli what the Lord had said, would tell none besides.

God calls each child in our homes as truly as He did

Samuel. From each the same obedience is asked. Each may, like the boy in the Tabernacle, grow up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and so escape the many scars and sorrows of a life wrongly begun. Let parents see to it that they think rightly of their work, and do not content themselves with conveying information, but aim at nothing short of helping all their children to hear and lovingly to yield to the gentle call of the incarnate God!

FAITHLESSNESS AND DEFEAT

'And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. 2. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. 3. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. 4. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. 7. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. 8. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. 10. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. 11. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. 12. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. 13. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. 14. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. 15. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. 16. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? 17. And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and

Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. 18. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.'—1 SAMUEL iv. 1-18.

THE first words of verse 1 are closely connected with the end of chapter iii., and complete the account of Samuel's inauguration. 'The word of the Lord' came to Samuel, and 'the word of Samuel came to all Israel.' The one clause tells of the prophet's inspiration, the other of his message and its reception by the nation. This bond of union between the clauses has been broken by the chapter division, apparently for the sake of representing the revolt against the Philistines as due to Samuel's instigation. But its being so is very doubtful. If God had sent the army into the field, He would have prepared it, by penitent return to Him, for victory, as no defeat follows on war which He commands. Probably Samuel's mission made an unwholesome ferment in minds which were quite untouched by its highest significance, and so led to a precipitate rebellion, preceded by no religious reformation, and therefore sure to fail. It was twenty years too soon (1 Sam. vii. 3). Samuel took no part in the struggle, and his name is never mentioned till, at the end of that period, he emphatically condemns all that had been done, and points the true path of deliverance, in 'return to the Lord with all your heart.' So the great lesson of this story is that when Israel fights Philistines, unbidden and unrepentant, it is sure to be beaten,—a truth with manifold wide applications.

The first disastrous defeat took place on a field, which was afterwards made memorable by a great victory, and by a name which lives still as a watchword for hope and gratitude. Happy they who at last conquer where they once failed, and in the retrospect can say,

'Hitherto the Lord helped,' both by defeat and by the victory for which defeat prepared a way! That opening struggle, bloody and grave as it was, was not decisive; for the Israelites regained their fortified camp unmolested, and held together, and kept their communications open, as appears from what followed.

Verses 3 to 5 give us a glimpse into the camp of Israel, and verses 6 to 9 into that of the Philistines. These two companion pictures are worth looking at. The two armies are very much alike, and we may say that the purpose of the picture is to show how Israel was practically heathen, taking just the same views of its relation to God which the Philistines did. Note, too, the absence of central authority. 'The elders' hold a kind of council. Where were Eli the judge and Samuel the prophet? Neither had part in this war. The question of the elders was right, inasmuch as it recognised that the Lord had smitten them, but wrong inasmuch as it betrayed that they had not the faintest notion that the reason was their own moral and religious apostasy. They had not learned the A B C of their history, and of the conditions of national prosperity. They stand precisely on the Pagan level, believing in a national God, who ought to help his votaries, but from some inexplicable caprice does not; or who, perhaps, is angry at the omission of some ritual observance. What an answer they would have got if Samuel had been there! There ought to have been no need for the question, or, rather, there was need for it, and the answer ought to have been clear to them; their sin was the all-sufficient reason for their defeat. There are plenty of Christians, like these elders, who, when they find themselves beaten by the world and the devil, puzzle their brains to invent all

sorts of reasons for God's smiting, except the true one,—their own departure from Him.

The remedy suggested by the united wisdom of the leaders was as heathen as the consultation which resulted in it. 'Let us send for the ark.' 'Those who regarded not the God of the ark,' says Bishop Hall, 'think themselves safe and happy in the ark of God.' They thought, with that confusion between symbol and reality which runs through all heathen worship, and makes the danger of 'images,' whether in heathenism or in sensuous Christianity, that if they brought the ark, they brought God with it. It was a kind of charm, which would help them, they hardly knew how. Its very name might have taught them better. They call it 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord'; and a covenant has two parties to it, and promises favour on conditions. If they had kept the conditions, these four thousand corpses would not have been lying stiff and stark outside the rude encampment. As they did not keep them, bringing the chest which contained the transcript of them into their midst was bringing a witness of their apostasy, not a helper of their feebleness. Repentance would have brought God. Dragging the ark thither only removed Him farther away. We need not be too hard upon these people; for the natural disposition of us all is to trust to the externals of worship, and to put a punctilious attention to these in the place of a true cleaving of heart to the God who dwells near us, and is in us and on our side, if we cling to Him with penitent love. Even God-appointed symbols become snares. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are treated by multitudes as these elders did the ark. The fewer and simpler the outward observances of worship are, the less danger is there of the poor sense-

bound soul tarrying in them, instead of passing by means of them into the higher, purer air beyond.

What right had these presumptuous elders to bring the ark from Shiloh? Eli was its guardian; and he, as appears probable from his anxiety about its fate, did not approve of its removal. But 'the people' took the law into their own hands. There seems some hint that their action was presumptuous profanation, in the solemn, full title given in verse 4: 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth between the cherubim,'—as if contrasting His awful majesty, His universal dominion over the armies of heaven and the embattled powers of the universe, and the dazzling light of that 'glory,' which shone in the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle, with the unanointed hands that presumed to press in thither and drag so sacred a thing into the light of common day and the tumult of the camp. Nor is the profanation lessened, but rather increased, by the priestly attendants, Eli's two sons, themselves amongst the worst men in Israel. When Hophni and Phinehas are its priests, the ark can bring no help. Heathenism separates religion from morality altogether. In it there is no connection between worship and purity, and the Old Testament religion for the first time welded these two inseparably together. That tumultuous procession from Shiloh, with these two profligates for the priests of God, and the bearers thinking that they were sure of their God's favour now, whatever their sin, shows how completely Israel had forgotten its own law, and, whilst professedly worshipping Jehovah, had really become a heathen people. The reception of the ark with that fierce shout, which echoed among the hills and was heard in the Philistines' encampment, shows the same

thing. Not so should the ark have been received, but with tears and confessions and silent awe. No man in all that host had ever looked upon it before. No man ought to have seen it *then*. Once a year, and not without blood sprinkled on its cover, the high priest might look on it through the cloud of incense which kept him from death, while all the people waited hushed till he came forth, but now it is dragged into the camp, and welcomed with a yell of mad delight, as a pledge of victory. What could display more strikingly the practical heathenism of the people?

Verses 6 to 9 take us into the other camp, and show us the undisguised heathens. The Philistines think just as the other side did, only, in their polytheistic way, they do not use the name 'Jehovah,' but speak first of 'God' and then of 'gods' as having arrived in the camp. The nations dreaded each other's gods, though they worshipped their own; and the Philistines believed quite as much that 'Jehovah' was the Hebrew's God, as that 'Dagon' was theirs. There was to be a duel then between the two superhuman powers. The vague reports which they had heard of the Exodus, nearly five hundred years ago, filled the Philistines with panic. They had but a confused notion of the facts of that old story, and thought that Egypt had met the ten plagues 'in the wilderness.' The blunder is very characteristic, and helps to show the accuracy of our narrative. It would not have occurred to a legend-maker. It sounds strange to us that the Philistines' belief that the Hebrews' God had come to their help should issue in exhortations to 'fight like men.' But polytheism makes that quite a natural conclusion; and there is something almost fine in the truculent boldness with which they set their teeth for a fierce

struggle. They reiterate to one another the charge to 'quit themselves like men'; and while they do not hide from themselves that the question whether they are to be still masters is hanging on the coming struggle, a dash of contempt for the 'Hebrews' who had been their 'slaves' is perceptible.

According to verse 10, the Philistines appear to have begun the attack, perhaps taking the enemy by surprise. The rout this time was complete. The grim catalogue of disaster in verses 10 and 11 is strangely tragic in its dreadful, monotonous plainness, each clause adding something to the terrible story, and each linked to the preceding by a simple 'and.' The Israelites seem to have been scattered. 'They fled, every man to his tent.' The army, with little cohesion and no strong leaders, melted away. The ark was captured, and its two unworthy attendants slain. Bringing it had not brought God, then. It was but a chest of shittimwood, with two slabs of lettered stone in it,—and what help was in that? But its capture was the sign that the covenant with Israel was for the time annulled. The whole framework of the nation was disorganised. The keystone was struck out of their worship, and they had fallen, by their own sin, to the level of the nations, and even below these; for they had their gods, but Israel had turned away from their God, and He had departed from them. Superstition fancied that the presence of the ark secured to impenitent men the favour of God; but it was no superstition which saw in its absence from Shiloh His averted face.

Is there in poetry or drama a more vivid and pathetic passage than the closing verses of this narrative, which tell of the panting messenger and the old blind Eli?

'Eben-ezer' cannot have been very far from Shiloh, for the fugitive had seen the end of the fight, and reached the city before night. He came with the signs of mourning, and, as it would appear from verse 13, passed the old man at the gate without pausing, and burst into the city with his heavy tidings. One can almost hear the shrill shrieks of wrath and despair which first told Eli that something was wrong. Blind and unwieldy and heavy-hearted, he sat by the gate to which the news would first come; but yet he is the last to hear,—perhaps because all shrank from telling him, perhaps because in the confusion no one remembered him. Only after he had asked the meaning of the tumult, of which his foreboding heart and conscience told him the meaning before it was spoken, is the messenger brought to the man to whom he should have gone first. How touchingly the story pauses, even at this crisis, to paint the poor old man! A stronger word is used to describe his blindness than in 1 Samuel iii. 2, as the Revised Version shows. His fixed eyeballs were sightless now; and there he sat, dreading and longing to hear. The fugitive's account of himself is shameless in its avowal of his cowardice, and prepares Eli for the worst. But note how he speaks gently and with a certain dignity, crushing down his anxiety,—'How went the matter, my son?' Then, with no merciful circumlocution or veiling, out comes the whole dismal story once again.

Eli spoke no more. His sons' death had been the sign given him years before that the threatenings against his house should be fulfilled; but even that blow he can bear. But the capture of the ark is more than a personal sorrow, and his start of horror overbalances him, and he falls from his seat (which probably had no back

to it), and dies, silent, of a broken neck and a broken heart. His forty years of judgeship ended thus. He was in many respects good and lovable, gentle, courteous, devout. His kindly treatment of Hannah, his fatherly training of Samuel, his submission to the divine message through the child, his 'trembling for the ark,' his death at the news of its being taken, all indicate a character of real sweetness and true godliness. But all was marred by a fatal lack of strong, stern resolve to tolerate no evil which he ought to suppress. Good, weak men, especially when they let foolish tenderness hinder righteous severity, bring terrible evils on themselves, their families, and their nation. It was Eli who, at bottom, was the cause of the defeat and the disasters which slew his sons and broke his own heart. Nothing is more cruel than the weak indulgence which, when men are bringing a curse on themselves by their sin, 'restrains them not.'

REPENTANCE AND VICTORY

'And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. 2. And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. 3. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. 4. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. 5. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. 6. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. 7. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. 9. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. 10. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew

near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. 11. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. 12. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.—1 SAMUEL vii. 1-12.

THE ark had spread disaster in Philistia and Bethshemesh, and the willingness of the men of Kirjath-jearim to receive it was a token of their devotion. They must have been in some measure free from idolatry and penetrated with reverence. The name of the city (*City of the Woods*, like our *Woodville*) suggests the situation of the little town, 'bosomed high in tufted trees,' where the ark lay for so long, apparently without sacrifices, and simply watched over by Eleazar, who was probably of the house of Aaron. Eli's family was exterminated; Shiloh seems to have been destroyed, or, at all events, forsaken; and for twenty years internal disorganisation and foreign oppression, relieved only by Samuel's growing influence, prevailed. But during these dark days a better mind was slowly appearing among the people. 'All . . . Israel lamented after the Lord.' Lost blessings are precious. God was more prized when withdrawn. Happy they to whom darkness brightens that Light which brightens all darkness! Our text gives us three main points,—the preparation for victory in repentance and return (verses 3-9); the victory (verses 10, 11); the thankful commemoration of victory (verse 12).

I. We have first the preparation for victory in repentance and return. At the time of the first fight at Eben-ezer, Israel was full of idolatry and immorality. Then their preparation for battle was the mere bringing the ark into the camp, as if it were a fetish or magic charm. That was pure heathenism, and they were

idolaters in such worship of Jehovah, just as much as if they had been bowing to Baal. Many of us rely on our baptism or on churchgoing precisely in the same spirit, and are as truly pagans. Not the name of the Deity, but the spirit of the worshipper, makes the 'idolater.'

How different this second preparation! Samuel, who had never been named in the narrative of defeat, now reappears as the acknowledged prophet and, in a sense, dictator. The first requirement is to come back to the Lord 'with the whole heart,' and that return is to be practically exhibited in the complete forsaking of Baal and the Ashtoreths. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' It must be 'Him only,' if it is Him at all. Real religion is exclusive, as real love is. In its very nature it is indivisible, and if given to two is accepted by neither. So there was some kind of general and perhaps public giving up of the idols, and some, though probably not the fully appointed, public service of Jehovah. If we are to have His strength infused for victory, we must cast away our idols, and come back to Him with all our hearts. The hands that would clasp Him, and be upheld by the clasp, must be emptied of trifles. To yield ourselves wholly to God is the secret of strength.

The next step was a solemn national assembly at Samuel's town of Mizpeh, situated on a conspicuous hill, north-west of Jerusalem, which still is called 'the prophet Samuel.' Sacrifices were offered, which are no part of the Mosaic ritual. A significant part of these consisted in the pouring out of water 'before the Lord,' probably as emblematic of the pouring out of soul in penitence; for it was accompanied by fasting and confession of sin. The surest way to the true

victory, which is the conquest of our sins, is confessing them to God. When once we have seen any sin in its true character clearly enough to speak to Him about it, we have gone far to emancipate ourselves from it, and have quickened our consciences towards more complete intolerance of its hideousness. Confession breaks the entail of sin, and substitutes for the dreary expectation of its continuance the glad conviction of forgiveness and cleansing. It does not make a stiff fight unnecessary; for assured freedom from sin is not the easy prize of confession, but the hard-won issue of sturdy effort in God's strength. But it is like blowing the trumpet of revolt,—it gives the signal for, and itself begins, the conflict. The night before the battle should be spent, not in feasting, but in prayer and lowly shriving of our souls before the great Confessor.

The watchful Philistines seem to have had their attention attracted by the unusual stir among their turbulent subjects, and especially by this suspicious gathering at Mizpeh, and they come suddenly up the passes from their low-lying territory to disperse it. A whiff of the old terror blows across the spirits of the people, not unwholesomely; for it sets them, not to desire the outward presence of the ark, not to run from their post, but to beseech Samuel's intercession. They are afraid, but they mean to fight all the same, and, because they are afraid, they long for God's help. That is the right temper, which, if a man cherish, he will not be defeated, however many Philistines rush at him. Twenty years of slavery had naturally bred fear in them, but it is a wise fear which breeds reliance on God. Our enemy is strong, and no fault is more fatal than an underestimate of his power. If we go into battle singing, we shall probably come out of it weeping,

or never come out at all. If we begin bragging, we shall end bleeding. It is only he who looks on the advancing foe, and feels 'They are too strong for me,' who will have to say, as he watches them retreating, 'He delivered me from my strong enemy.' We should think much of our foes and little of ourselves. Such a temper will lead to caution, watchfulness, wise suspicion, vigorous strain of all our little power, and, above all, it will send us to our knees to plead with our great Captain and Advocate.

Samuel acts as priest and intercessor, offering a burnt-offering, which, like the pouring out of water, is no part of the Mosaic sacrifices. The fact is plain, but it is neither unaccountable nor large enough to warrant the sweeping inferences which have been drawn from it and its like, as to the non-existence at this period of the developed ceremonial in Leviticus. We need only remember Samuel's special office, and the seclusion in which the ark lay, to have a sufficient explanation of the cessation of the appointed worship and the substitution of such 'irregular' sacrifices. We are on surer ground when we see here the incident to which Psalm xcix. 6 refers ('Samuel among them that call upon His name. They called upon the Lord, and He answered them'), and when we learn the lesson that there is a power in intercession which we can use for one another, and which reaches its perfection in the prevailing prayer of our great High-priest, who, like Samuel and Moses, is on the mountain praying, while we fight in the plain.

II. We have next the victory on the field of the former defeat. The battle is joined on the old ground. Strategic considerations probably determined the choice as they did in the case of the many battles on the plain

of Esdraelon, for instance, or on the fields of the Netherlands. Probably the armies met on some piece of level ground in one of the wadies, up which the Philistines marched to the attack. At all events, there they were, face to face once more on the old spot. On both sides might be men who had been in the former engagement. Depressing remembrances or burning eagerness to wipe out the shame would stir in those on the one side; contemptuous remembrance of the ease with which the last victory had been won would animate the other. God Himself helped them by the thunderstorm, the solemn roll of which was 'the voice of the Lord' answering Samuel's prayer. The ark had brought only defeat to the impure host; the sacrifice brings victory to the penitent army. Observe that the defeat is accomplished before 'the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh.' God scattered the enemy, and Israel had only to pursue flying foes, as they hurried in wild confusion down the pass, with the lightning flashing behind them. The same pregnant expression is used for the rout of the Philistines as for the previous one of Israel. 'They were smitten *before*,' not *by*, the victors. The true victor was God.

The story gives boundless hope of victory, even on the fields of our former defeats. We can master rooted faults of character, and overcome temptations which have often conquered us. Let no man say: 'Ah! I have been beaten so often that I may as well give up the fight altogether. Years and years I have been a slave, and everywhere I tread on old battlefields, where I have come off second-best. It will never be different. I may as well cease struggling.' However obstinate the fault, however often it has re-established its dominion and dragged us back to slavery, when we

thought that we had made good our escape,—that is no reason to ‘bate one jot of heart or hope.’ We have every reason to hope bravely and boundlessly in the possibility of victory. True, we should rightly despair if we had only our own powers to depend on. But the grounds of our confidence lie in the inexhaustible fulness of God’s Spirit, and the certain purpose of His will that we should be purified from all iniquity, as well as in the proved tendency of the principles and motives of the gospel to produce characters of perfect goodness, and, above all, in the sacrifice and intercession of our Captain on high. Since we have Christ to dwell in us, and be the seed of a new life, which will unfold into the likeness of that life from which it has sprung; since we have a perfect Example in Him who became like us in lowliness of flesh, that we might become like Him in purity of spirit; since we have a gospel which enjoins and supplies the mightiest motives for complete obedience; and since the most rooted and inveterate evils are no part of ourselves, but ‘vipers’ which may be ‘shaken from the hand’ into which they have struck their fangs, we commit faithless treason against God, His message, and ourselves, when we doubt that we shall overcome all our sins. We should not, then, go into the fight downhearted, with our banners drooping, as if defeat sat on them. The belief that we shall conquer has much to do with victory. That is true in all sorts of conflicts. So, though the whole field may be strewed with relics, eloquent of former disgrace, we may renew the struggle with confidence that the future will not always copy the past. We ‘are saved by hope’; by hope we are made strong. It is the very helmet on our heads. The warfare with our own evils should be waged in the assurance that every field of our defeat

shall one day see set up on it the trophy of, not our victory, but God's in us.

III. We have here the grateful commemoration of victory. Where that gray stone stands no man knows to-day, but its name lives for ever. This trophy bore no vaunts of leader's skill or soldier's bravery. One name only is associated with it. It is 'the stone of help,' and its message to succeeding generations is: 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.' That 'Hitherto' is the word of a mighty faith. It includes as parts of one whole the disaster no less than the victory. The Lord was helping Israel no less by sorrow and oppression than by joy and deliverance. The defeat which guided them back to Him was tender kindness and precious help. He helps us by griefs and losses, by disappointments and defeats; for whatever brings us closer to Him, and makes us feel that all our bliss and wellbeing lie in knowing and loving Him, is helpful beyond all other aid, and strength-giving above all other gifts.

Such remembrance has in it a half-uttered prayer and hope for the future. 'Hitherto' means more than it says. It looks forward as well as backward, and sees the future in the past. Memory passes into hope, and the radiance in the sky behind throws light on to our forward path. God's 'hitherto' carries 'henceforward' wrapped up in it. His past reveals the eternal principles which will mould His future acts. He has helped, therefore he will help, is no good argument concerning men; but it is valid concerning God.

The devout man's 'gratitude' is, and ought to be, 'a lively sense of favours to come.' We should never doubt but that, as good John Newton puts it, in words which bid fair to last longer than Samuel's gray stone:—

'Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.'

We may write that on every field of our life's conflicts, and have it engraved at last on our gravestones, where we rest in hope.

The best use of memory is to mark more plainly than it could be seen at the moment the divine help which has filled our lives. Like some track on a mountain side, it is less discernible to us, when treading it, than when we look at it from the other side of the glen. Many parts of our lives, that seemed unmarked by any consciousness of God's help while they were present, flash up into clearness when seen through the revealing light of memory, and gleam purple in it, while they looked but bare rocks as long as we were stumbling among them. It is blessed to remember, and to see everywhere God's help. We do not remember aright unless we do. The stone that commemorates our lives should bear no name but one, and this should be all that is read upon it: 'Now unto Him that kept us from falling, unto Him be glory!'

'MAKE US A KING'

'Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel, unto Ramah. 5. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. 6. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. 7. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. 8. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. 9. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. 10. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. 11. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

12. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. 13. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. 14. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. 15. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. 16. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. 17. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. 18. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. 19. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; 20. That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.'—1 SAMUEL viii. 4-20.

THE office of judge was as little capable of transmission from father to son as that of prophet, so that Samuel's appointment of his sons as judges must be regarded as contrary to its true idea. It was God who made the judges, and the introduction, in however slight a degree, of the hereditary principle, was not only politically a blunder, but religiously wrong. Our narrative, like Scripture generally, pronounces no opinion on the facts it records, but its unfavourable judgment may be safely inferred from its explanation that Samuel was 'old' when he made the appointment, and that his sons were corrupt and unjust. Our text deals with the unexpectedly wide consequences of that act, in the clamour for a king.

I. Note the ill-omened request. A formal delegation of the representatives of the nation comes to Ramah, unsummoned by Samuel, with the demand for a king. There must have been much talk through Israel before the general mind could have been ascertained, and this step taken. Not a whisper of what was passing seems to have reached Samuel, and the request is flung at him in harsh language. It is not pleasant for any one, least of all for a ruler, to be told that everybody sees that he is getting old, and should provide for what is to come next. Fathers do not like to be told that their

sons are disreputable, but Samuel had to hear the bitter truth. The old man was pained by it, and felt that the people were tired of him, as is plain enough from the divine words which followed, and bade him look beyond the ingratitude displayed towards himself, to that shown to God. But from the 'practical' point of view, there was a great deal to be said for the reasonableness and political wisdom of the elders' suggestion. Samuel had shown that he felt the danger of leaving the nation without a leader, by his nomination of his sons, and the proposal of a king is but carrying his policy a little farther. The hereditary principle once admitted, a full-blown king was evidently the best. There were many inconveniences in the rule by judges. They had no power but that of force of personal character and the authority of an unseen Lord. They left no successors; and long intervals had elapsed, and might again elapse, between the death of one and the rise of another, during which the nation appeared to have no head to guide nor arm to defend it. Examples of strong monarchies surrounded them, and they wanted to have a centre of unity and a defender in the person of a king.

Samuel's displeasure seems to have been mainly on the ground of the insult to himself in the proposal, and its bearing on the rule of Jehovah over the people does not seem to have occurred to him till it was pointed out by the divine voice. But, like a good and wise man, he took his perplexity and trouble to God; and there he got light. The divine judgment of the request cuts down to its hidden, and probably unconscious, motive, and shows Samuel that weariness of him was only its surface, while the true bottom of it was rejection of God. The parallel drawn with idolatry is very instructive. The two things were but diverse

forms of the same sense-ridden disposition: the one being an inability to grasp the thought of the unseen God; the other, a precisely similar inability to keep on the high level of trust in an unseen defender, and obedience to an unseen monarch. They wished for a king 'to go out before them' and 'fight their battles' (v. 20). Had they forgotten Eben-ezer, and many another field, where they and their fathers had but to stand still and see the Lord fight for them?

The very same difficulty in living in quiet reliance on a power which is perceptible by no sense, besets us. We too are ever being tempted to prefer the solid security, as our foolish senses call it, of visible supports and delights, to the shadowy help of an unseen Arm. How many of us would feel safer with a good balance at our banker's than with God's promises! How many of us live as if we thought that men or women were better recipients of our love and of our trust than God! How few, even of professing Christians, really and habitually 'walk by faith, not by sight'! Do we not see ourselves in the mirror of this story? If we do not, we should. Note that the elders had, apparently, no idea that they were rejecting God in wanting a king. Samuel says nothing of the sort to them, and they could scarcely have made the request so boldly and briefly if they had been conscious that it was upsetting the very basis of their national life. Men are slow to appreciate the full force of their craving for visible good. The petitioners could plead many strong reasons, and, no doubt, fancied themselves simply taking proper precautions for the future. A great deal of unavowed and unconscious unbelief wears the mask of wise foresight. We rather pride ourselves on our prudence, when we should be ashamed of our distrust.

Note, too, that we cannot combine reliance on the seen and the unseen. Life must be moulded by one or the other. The craving for a king was the rejection of Jehovah. We must elect by which we shall live, and from which we shall draw our supreme good.

The desire to be like their neighbours was another motive with the elders. It is hard to be singular, and to foster reliance on the invisible, when all around us are dazzling examples of the success attending the other course. One of the first lessons which we have to learn, and one of the last which we have to practise, is a wholesome disregard of other people's ways. If we are to do anything worth doing, we must be content to be in a minority of one, if needful.

II. Note God's concession of the foolish wish. The divine word to Samuel throws light on the nature of prophetic inspiration. He is bidden to 'hearken to the people's voice'—a procedure directly opposite to his own ideas. This is not a case of subsequent reflection modifying first impressions, but of an authoritative voice discerned by the hearer to be not his own, contradicting his own thoughts, and leaving no room for further consideration.

Further, the granting to Israel of the king whom they desired, is but one instance of the law which is exemplified in God's dealing with nations and individuals, according to which He lets them have their own way, that they may 'be filled with their own devices.' Such experience is the best teacher, though her school fees are high. The surest way to disgust men with their own folly, is to let it work out its results,—just as boys in sweetmeat shops are allowed to eat as much as they like at first, and so get a distaste for the dainties. 'Try it, then, and see how you like it,' is not an unkind

thing to say, and God often says it to us. When argument and appeals to duty and the like fail, there is nothing more to be done but to let us have our request, and find out the poison that lurked under the fair outside. The prodigal son gets his coveted portion, and is allowed to go into the far country, that he may prove how good and happy it is to starve among the swine, not because his father is angry with him, but because such experience is the only way to re-awaken his dormant love, and to make him long for the despised place in his father's house. There are some fevers of the desires which must run their course before the patient can be well again. Let us keep a careful watch over ourselves, that we entertain no wishes but such as run parallel with God's manifest will, lest He may have in His anger, which is still love, to give us our request, that we may find out our error by the bitter fruits of a granted desire.

III. Note the obstinacy that, with eyes open to the consequences, persists in its demands. Samuel is bidden to 'show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.' He sketches, in sombre outline, the picture of an Eastern despot, the only kind of king which the world then knew. The darker features of these monarchies are not included. There is no harem, nor cruelty, nor monstrous vice, in the picture; but the diversion of labour to minister to royal pomp, the establishment of a standing army, the alienation of land to officials, heavy taxation and forced labour make up the items. To these is added (v. 18) that the royalty, now so eagerly desired, would sooner or later become a burden, and that then they or their sons would find it was easier to put on than to put off the yoke; for 'the Lord will not hear you in that day,' in reference, that

is, to the removal of the king. They were exchanging an unseen King who gave all things for one who would take, and not give. A wise exchange! The consequences of our wishes are not always drawn out so clearly before us as in this instance; but we are not left in darkness as to the broad issues, and we all know enough to make our persistence in evil, after such warnings, the deepest mystery and most flagrant sin. The drunkard is not deterred by his knowledge that there is such a thing as *delirium tremens*; nor the thief, by the certainty that the officer's hand will be laid on his shoulder one day or other; nor the young profligate, by the danger that his bones shall be 'full of the sin of his youth'; nor are any of us kept from our sins, by the clear sight of their end. 'I have loved strangers, and after them will I go,' notwithstanding all knowledge of the fatal issue. Surely there is nothing sadder than that power of neglecting the most certain known result of our acts. Wilfully blind, and hurried on by lust, passion, or other impulse, like bulls which shut their eyes when they charge, we rush at our mark, and often dash ourselves to pieces on it. If a man saw the consequences of his sin at the moment of temptation, he would not do it; but this is the wonder, that he does not see them, though he knows them well enough, and that the knowledge has no power to restrain him.

IV. Note the divine purpose which uses man's sin as its instrument in advancing its designs. God had promised Israel a king (Deut. xvii. 14, etc.), and the elders may have thought that they were only asking for what was in accordance with His plan. So they were; but their motive was wrong, and so their prayer, though for what God meant to give, was wrong. In this case, as always, God uses men's sins as occasions for the

furtherance of His own eternal purpose, as that profound saying has it, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee.' The kingly office was a step in advance, and gave occasion to the development of Messianic expectations of the true King of Israel and of men, which would have been impossible without it. In many ways it was for the good of the nation, and the holders of the office were 'the Lord's anointed.' Modern criticism has found traces of two opposite views in this story, as compared with the passage in Deuteronomy above referred to; but surely it is a more sober, though less novel, view, to regard the whole incident as illustrating the two truths, that men may wish for right things in a wrong way, and that God uses sin as well as obedience as His instrument. No barriers can stop the march of His great purpose through the ages, any more than a bit of glass can stay a sunbeam. However the currents run and the storms howl, they carry the ship to the haven; for He holds the helm, and all winds help. The people rejected Him, and in seeking a king followed but their own earthly minds; but they prepared the way for David and David's Son. Their children long after, moved by the same spirit, shouted, 'We have no king but Cæsar!' but they prepared the throne for the true King, for whom they destined a Cross. Man's greatest sin, the rejection of the visible King of the world, brought about the firm establishment of His dominion on earth and in heaven. The cross is the great instance of the same law as is embodied in this history,—the overruling providence which bends the antagonism of men into a tool for effecting the purpose of God.

Alas for those who only thus carry on God's designs! They perish, and their work is none the less their sin,

because God has used it. How much better to enter with a willing heart and a clear intelligence into sympathy with His designs, and, delighting to do His will, to share in the eternal duration of His triumphant purpose! 'The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

THE OLD JUDGE AND THE YOUNG KING

'Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, 16. To-morrow, about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over My people Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me. 17. And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people. 18. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. 19. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to-day, and to-morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. 20. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? 21. And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? 22. And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. 23. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. 24. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day. 25. And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. 26. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. 27. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.'—1 SAMUEL ix. 15-27.

BOTH the time and the place of the incidents here told are unknown. No note is given of the interval that had elapsed since the elders' deputation. All that we know is that on the previous day Samuel had had the divine communication mentioned in verse 15, and that some days are implied as spent by Saul in his

quest for his father's asses. Equally uncertain is the name of the city. It was not Samuel's ordinary residence; it was in the 'land of Zuph,' an unknown district; it was perched, like most of the cities, on a hill; it had fountains lower down the slope, and a 'high place' farther up, where there was a building large enough for a feast. How strangely vivid the picture of this anonymous city is, and how we can yet see the maidens coming down to the fountains, the wearied travellers toiling up, and the voluble abundance of the directions given them!

I. The first thing we have to note is the premonitory word of the Lord. Observe the picturesque and forcible expression, 'had uncovered the ear of Samuel.' It is more than picturesque. It gives in the strongest form the fact of a revelation, both as to its origin and its secrecy. It is vain to represent the transition from judgeship to monarchy as a mere political revolution, inaugurated by Samuel as a fore-seeing statesman. It is misleading to speak of him, as Dean Stanley does, as one of the men who mediate between the old and the new. His opinions and views go for just nothing in the transaction, and he is simply God's instrument. The people's desire for the king, and God's answer to it, were equally independent of him. His own ideas were dead against the change, and at each step in bringing it about the divine causality is everything, and he is nothing but its obedient servant. It is hopeless to sift out a naturalistic explanation from the narrative, which is either supernatural or nothing. Note the three points of this communication,—God's sending Saul, the command to anoint, and the motive ascribed to God. As to the first, how striking that full-toned authoritative 'I will send' is! Think of the

chain of ordinary events which brought Saul to the little city,—the wandering of a drove of asses, the failure to get on their tracks, the accident of being in the land of Zuph when he got tired of the search, the suggestion of the servant; and behind all these, and working through them, the will and hand of God, thrusting this man, all unconscious, along a path which he knew not. Our own purposes we may know, but God's we do not know. There is something awful in the thought of the issues that may spring from the smallest affairs, and we shall be bewildered and paralysed if once we get a glimpse of the complicated web which is ever being woven in the loom of time, unless we, too, can, by faith, see the Weaver, and then we shall be at rest. Call nothing trivial, and seek to be conscious of His guiding hand.

The command to Samuel to anoint Saul is no product of Samuel's own reflection, but comes to him, in this imperative form, before he has seen Saul, like a commission in blank, in regard to which he has no option, and in the origin of which he had no share. It was a piece of painful work to devolve his authority, like Aaron's having to strip off his robes before he died, and to put them on his son. But there is no trace of wounded feeling in Samuel. He is true to his childhood's word, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and, no doubt, he had the reward which obedience ever has to sweeten the bitterest draught, the reward of a quiet heart.

The reason as given in the last clause of the verse ought to have made Samuel's self-abnegation easier. God sets him the example. Israel had rejected Him, but He still calls them 'My people,' and looks upon them in tender care, and hears their cry. There is

no contradiction here with the aspect of the concession to the people's wish, which appeared in the former section. Hasty criticism tries to make out discrepancies in the accounts, because it does not recognise one of the plainest characteristics of Scripture; namely, its habit of stating strongly and exclusively that side of a complicated matter which is relevant to the purpose in hand, and leaving the other sides to be presented in due time. The three accounts of the election give three different reasons for it. In chapter viii., the people put it on the ground of Samuel's age and his son's unfitness, and God treats it as national rejection of Him. Here it appears as due, on the part of the people, to their fear of the Philistines, and on the part of God to His loving yielding to their cry. In 1 Samuel xii. 12, Samuel traces it to the fear of Ammonite invasion. Are these contradictory or supplementary accounts? Certainly the latter. Though Israel had in heart rejected God, and He gave them a king that they might learn how much better they would have been without one, it is as true that He lovingly listened to the cry of their fear, and answered them, in pity and tender care, by giving them the king whom they desired, and who would deliver them from their enemies. Let us learn how patient of our faithless follies, and how full of long-suffering love, even in 'anger,' He is. The same gift of His providence, regarded in one light, is loving chastisement, and in another is loving compliance with our cry and swift help to our need in the shape that we desire, but in both aspects is good and perfect. Note, too, that God's look is active, and is the bringing of the needed aid, and that He waits for our cry before He comes with His help.

II. The meeting of Samuel and Saul. They encounter each other in the gate,—the prophet on his way to the sacrifice, the future king with his head full of his humble quest. Samuel knows Saul by divine intimation as soon as he sees him, but Saul does not know Samuel. His question indicates the noble simplicity, without attendants or trappings, of the judge's life; but it also suggests the strange isolation of these early days, and the probable indifference of Saul to religion. If he had cared much about God's rule in Israel, he could scarcely have been so ignorant as his servant's words about 'the seer,' and his failure to know him when he saw him, show Saul to have been. He had not cared to see Samuel in any of the latter's circuits, and now he only wants to get some information from a diviner about these unfortunate asses. What a contrast between the thoughts of the two, as they looked at each other! Saul begins by consulting Samuel as a magician; he ends by seeking counsel from the witch at Endor. Samuel's words are beautiful in their smothering of all personal feeling, and dignified in their authority. He at once takes command of Saul, and prepares him by half-hints for something great to come. The direction to 'go up before me' is a sign of honour. The invitation to the sacrificial feast is another. The promise to disclose his own secret thoughts to Saul may, perhaps, point to some hidden ambitions, the knowledge of which would prove Samuel's prophetic character. The assurance as to the asses answers the small immediate occasion of Saul's resort to him, and the dim hint in the last words of verse 20, rightly translated, tells him that 'all that is desirable in Israel' is for him, and for all his father's house. He went out to look for his

father's asses, and he found a kingdom. The words were enigmatical; but if Saul knew of the impending revolution, they could scarcely fail to dazzle him and take away his breath. His answer is more than mere Oriental self-depreciation. Its bashful modesty contrasts sadly with the almost insane masterfulness and arrogant self-will of his later years. Fair beginnings may end ill, and those who are set in positions of influence have hard work to keep steady heads, and to sail with low sails.

III. The feast. Up at the high place was some chamber used for the feasts which followed the sacrifices. A company of thirty—or, according to another reading, of seventy—persons had been invited, and the stately young stranger from Benjamin, with his servant (a trait of the simple manners of these days), is set in the place of honour, where wondering eyes fasten on him. Attention is still more emphatically centred on him when Samuel bids 'the cook' bring a part of the sacrifice which he had been ordered to set aside. It proves to be the 'shoulder,' or 'thigh,' the priest's perquisite, and therefore probably Samuel's. To give this to another was equivalent to putting him in Samuel's place; and Samuel's words in handing it to Saul make its meaning plain. It is 'that which hath been reserved.' It has been 'kept for thee' till 'the appointed time,' and that with a view to the assembled guests. All this is in true prophetic fashion, which delighted in symbols, and these of the homeliest sort. The whole transaction expressed the transference of power to Saul, the divine reserving of the monarchy for him, and the public investiture with it, by the prophet himself. The veil was intentional, and intentionally thin. Cannot we see the

flush of surprise and modesty on Saul's cheek, as he tore the pieces from the significant 'shoulder,' and hear the whispers that ran through the guest-chamber?

IV. The private colloquy. When the simple feast was over, the strangely assorted pair went down to Samuel's house, and there, on the quiet house-top, where were no curious ears, held long and earnest talk. No doubt Samuel told Saul all that was in his heart, as he had said that he would, and convinced him thereby that it was God who was speaking to him through the prophet. Nor would exhortations and warnings be wanting, which the old man's experience would be anxious to give, and the young one's modesty not unwilling to receive. Saul is a listener, not a speaker, in this unreported interview; and Samuel is in it, as throughout, the superior. The characteristic which marked the beginning of the Jewish monarchy was stamped on it till the end. The king was inferior to the prophet, and was meant to take his instructions from him when he appeared. Saul was docile on that first day, when he was half dazed with his new prospects, and wholly grateful to Samuel; but the history will show us how soon the fair promise of concord was darkened, and how fiercely he chafed at Samuel's attempted control.

One can fancy his thoughts as he lay in the starlight, on the house-top, that night, and gazed into the astounding future that had opened before him. Had there been any true religion in him, it would have been a wakeful night of prayer. But, more likely, as the event proves, the ambition and arrogance which were deep in his nature, though hitherto undeveloped, were his counsellors, and drove Samuel's wisdom out of his head.

As soon as the morning-red began to rise in the East, Samuel sent him away, to secure, as would appear, privacy in his departure. With simple courtesy the prophet accompanied his guest, and as soon as they had got down the hill beyond the last house of the city, he bids Saul send on his servant, that he may speak a last word to him alone. Our text stops before the solemn anointing, and leaves these two standing there, in the fresh morning, type of the new career opening for one of them. What a contrast in the men! The one has all his long life been true to his first vow, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and now has come, in fulness of years, and revered by all men, near the end of his patient, faithful service. His work is all but done, and his heart is quiet in the peace which is the best reward of loving and doing God's law. Ripened wisdom, calm trust, unhesitating submission cast a glory round the old man, who is now performing the supreme act of self-abnegation of his lifetime, and, not without a sense of relief, is laying the burden, so long and uncomplainingly borne, on the great shoulders of this young giant. The other has a humble past of a few years rapidly sinking out of his dazzled sight, and is in a whirl of emotion at the startling suddenness of his new dignity. When one thinks of Gilboa, and the desperate suicide there, how pathetic is that strong, jubilant young figure, in the morning light, below the city, as he bows his head to receive the anointing which, little as he knew it, was to prove his ruin! A life begun by obedient listening to God's voice, and continued in the same, comes at last to a blessed end, and is crowned with many goods. A life which but partially accepts God's will as its law, and rather

takes counsel of its own passions and arrogant self-sufficiency, may have much that is bright and lovable at its beginning, but will steadily darken as it goes on, and will set at last in eclipse and gloom.

THE KING AFTER MAN'S HEART

'And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh; 18. And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: 19. And ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. 20. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. 21. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. 22. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. 23. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. 24. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. 25. Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. 26. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. 27. But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.'—1 SAMUEL x. 17-27.

THESE verses fit on to chapter viii., chapters ix. to x. 16, being probably from another source, inserted here because the anointing of Saul, told in them, did occur between Samuel's dismissal of the people and his summoning of the national assembly which is here related. That private anointing of Saul was the divine call to him individually; the text tells of his public designation to the nation. The two are perfectly consistent, and, indeed, the private anointing is presupposed in the incident recorded in this passage, of Saul's hiding himself, for he could not have known the result that he would be 'taken,' unless he had had that

previous intimation. The assembly at Mizpah was not convened in order to choose a king, but to accept God's choice, which was then to be declared.

But before the choice was announced, a last appeal was made to the people, if, perchance, they might still be persuaded to forgo their rebellious desire. It is not, indeed, said that this final, all but hopeless attempt was made by Samuel at the divine command, and we are not told that he had any further revelation than that in chapter viii. 7-9. But, no doubt, he was speaking as Jehovah's mouthpiece, and so we have here one more instance of that long-suffering divine patience and love which 'hopeth all things,' and lingers pleadingly round the alienated heart, seeking to woo it back to itself, and never ceasing to labour to avert the evil deed, till it is actually and irrevocably done. It may be said that God knew that the appeal was sure to fail, and therefore could not have made it. But is not that mysterious continuance of effort, foreknown to be futile, the very paradox of God's love? Did not Jesus give the traitor the sop, as a last token of friendship, a last appeal to his heart? And does not God still in like manner deal with us all?

Observe how He seeks to win Israel back. It is not by threatenings, but by reminders of His great benefits. He will not drive men back to His service, like a slave-driver with brandished whip, but He wishes to draw them back by 'the cords of love.' It is service from hearts melted by thankfulness, and therefore overflowing in joyful, willing obedience and grateful acts, that He desires. 'The mercies of God' should lead to men offering themselves as 'living sacrifices.'

The last appeal failed, and Samuel at once went on to give the people the desired bitter which they thought

so sweet. Of course, it was by their representatives that the tribes presented themselves before God. The manner of making God's choice known is not told, and speculations as to it are idle. Probably a simple yes or no, as each tribe, family or individual was 'presented' was the mode, but how it was conveyed is quite unknown. That is a small matter; more important is it to note that Saul was chosen simply because he was the very type of the national ideal of a hero-king. Both here and in chapter ix. 2 his stature and bravery are the only qualities mentioned. What Israel wanted was a rough fighter, with physical strength, plenty of bone and muscle. About moral, intellectual or spiritual qualities they did not care, and they got the kind of king that they wanted,—the only kind that they could appreciate. The only way to teach them that one who was a head and shoulders taller than any of them was not thereby certified to be the ideal king, was to give them such a man, and let them see what good he would do them.

There is no surer index nor sharper test of national or individual character than the sort of 'heroes' they worship. *Vox populi* has not been very much refined since Saul's day. Athletes and soldiers still captivate the crowd, and a mere prophet like Samuel has no chance beside the man of broad shoulders and well-developed biceps. And very often communities, especially democratic ones, get the 'king' they desire, the leader, statesman or the like, who comes near their ideal. The man whom they choose is the man whom, generally, they deserve. Israel had an excuse for its burst of ardour for a soldier, for it was in deadly danger from the Philistines. Is there as good an excuse for us in Britain, in our recent adoration of successful generals? Israel found out that its idol

lacked higher gifts than thews and sinews, and experience taught them the falseness of their ideal.

Saul's hiding among the piles of miscellaneous baggage, which the multitude of representatives had brought with them, is usually set down to his credit, as indicating an engaging modesty; but there is another and more probable explanation of it, less creditable to him. Was it not rather occasioned by his shrinking from the heavy task that God was laying on him? He was not being summoned to a secure throne, but to 'go out before us, and fight our battles.' He might well shrink, but if he had been God-fearing and God-obeying and God-trusting, he would have cried, 'Here am I! send me,' instead of skulking among the stuff. There was another Saul, who could say, 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.' It had been better for the son of Kish if he had been like the young Pharisee from Tarsus. We too have divine calls in *our* lives, and alas! we too not seldom hide ourselves among the stuff, and try to avoid taking up some heavy duty, by absorbing our minds in material good. Few things have greater power of obscuring 'the heavenly vision,' and of rendering us unwilling to obey it, than the clinging to the things of this world, which are in their place as the traveller's luggage needful on the road, but very much out of their place when they become a hiding-place for a man whom God is calling to service.

The 'manner of the kingdom,' which Samuel wrote and laid up before the Lord, was probably not the same as 'the manner of the king' (chapter viii. 9-18), but a kind of constitution, or solemn statement of the principles which were to govern the monarchy. The reading in verse 26 should probably be 'the men of valour, instead of 'a band of men.' They were brave men,

'whose hearts God had touched.' Now that Saul was chosen by God, loyalty to God was shown by loyalty to Saul. The sin of the people's desire, and the drop from the high ideal of the theocracy, and the lack of lofty qualities in Saul, may all be admitted. But God has made him king, and that is enough. Henceforward, God's servants will be Saul's partisans. The malcontents were apparently but a small faction. They, perhaps, had had a candidate of their own, but, at all events, they criticised God's appointed deliverer, and saw nothing in him to warrant the expectation that he would be able to do much for Israel. Disparaging criticism of God's chosen instruments comes from distrust of God who chose them. To doubt *the* divinely sent Deliverer's power to 'save' is to accuse God of not knowing our needs and of miscalculating the power of His supply of them. But not a few of us put that same question in various tones of incredulity, scorn or indifference. Sense makes many mistakes when it takes to trying to weigh Christ in its vulgar balances, and to settling whether He looks like a Saviour and a King.

SAMUEL'S CHALLENGE AND CHARGE

'And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. 2. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. 3. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. 4. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. 5. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. 6. And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 7. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. 8. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord

sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. 9. And when they forgot the Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve Thee. 11. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. 12. And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king. 13. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers.'—1 SAMUEL xii. 1-15.

THE portion of Samuel's address included in this passage has three main sections: his noble and dignified assertion of his official purity, his summary of the past history, and his solemn declaration of the conditions of future wellbeing for the nation with its new king.

I. Probably the war with the Ammonite king Nahash, which had postponed the formal inauguration of the king, had been carried on in the neighbourhood of the Jordan valley; and thus Gilgal would be a convenient rendezvous. But it was chosen for other reasons also, and, as appears from 1 Samuel x. 8, had been fixed on by Samuel at his first interview with Saul. There the Covenant had been renewed, after the wanderers had crossed the river, with Joshua at their head, and it was fitting that the beginnings of the new form of the national life should be consecrated by worship on the same site as had witnessed the beginnings of the national life on the soil of the promised land. Perhaps the silent stones, which Joshua reared, stood there yet. At all events, sacred memories could scarcely fail, as the rejoicing crowd, standing where their fathers had renewed the Covenant, saw the blackened ruins of Jericho, and the foaming river, now, as then, filling all

its banks in the time of harvest, which their fathers had crossed with the ark, that was now hidden at Kirjath-jearim, for their guide. The very place spoke the same lessons from the past which Samuel was about to teach them.

There is just a faint trace of Samuel's disapproval of the new order in his first words. He takes care to throw the whole responsibility on the people; but, at the same time, he assumes the authoritative tone which becomes him, and quietly takes the position of superiority to the king whom he has made. 1 Samuel xi. 15 seems to imply that he took no part in the rejoicings. It was 'Saul and all the men of Israel' who were so glad. He was still hesitant as to the issue, and obeyed the divine command with clearer insight into its purpose than the shouting crowd and the proud young king had. There is something very pathetic in the contrast he draws between Saul and himself. 'The king walketh before you,' in all the vigour of his young activity, and delighting all your eyes, and 'I am old and gray-headed,' feeble, and fit for little more work, and therefore, as happens to such worn-out public servants, cast aside for a new man. Samuel was not a monster of perfection without human feelings. His sense of Israel's ingratitude to himself and practical revolt from God lay together in his mind, and colour this whole speech, which has a certain tone of severity, and an absence of all congratulation. Probably that accounts for the mention of his sons. The elders' frank statement of their low opinion of them had been a sore point with Samuel, and he cannot help alluding to it. It was not for want of possible successors in his own house that they had cried out for a king. If this be not the bearing of the allusion to his sons, it is difficult to

explain; and this obvious explanation would never have been overlooked if Samuel had not been idealised into a faultless saint. The dash of human infirmity and fatherly blindness gives reality to the picture. 'I have walked before you from my youth unto this day.' Note the recurrence of the same expression as is applied to Saul in the former part of the verse. It is as if he had said, 'Once I was as he is now,—young and active in your sight, and for your service. Remember these past years. May your new fancy's record be as stainless as mine is, when he is old and grayheaded!' The words bring into view the characteristic of Samuel's life which is often insisted on in the earlier chapters,—its calm, unbroken continuity and uniformity of direction, from the long-past days when he wore 'the little coat' his mother made him, with so many tears dropped on it, till this closing hour. While everything was rushing down to destruction in Eli's time, and his sons were rioting at the Tabernacle door, the child was growing up in the stillness; and from then till now, amid all changes, his course had been steady, and pointed to one aim. Blessed they whose age is but the fruitage of the promise of their youth! Blessed they who begin as 'little children,' with the forgiveness of sin and the knowledge of the Father, and who go on, as 'young men,' to overcome the Evil One, and end, as 'fathers,' with the deeper knowledge of Him who is 'from the beginning,' which is the reward of childhood's trust and manhood's struggles!

Samuel is still a prophet, but he is ceasing to be the sole authority, and, in his conscious integrity, calls for a public, full discharge, in the presence of the king. Note that verse 3 gives the first instance of the use of the name 'Messiah,' and think of the contrast

between Saul and Jesus. Observe, too, the simple manners of these times, when 'ox and ass' were the wealth. They would be poor plunder nowadays. Note also the various forms of injustice of which he challenges any one to convict him. Forcible seizure of live stock, fraud, harsh oppression, and letting suitors put gold on his eyes that he might not see, are the vices of the Eastern ruler to-day, and rampant in that unhappy land, as they have been ever since Samuel's time. I think I have heard of politicians in some other countries further west than Gilgal, who have axes to grind and logs to roll, and of the wonderful effects, in many places of business, of certain circular gold discs applied to the eyes. This man went away a poor man. He does not seem to have had salary, or retiring pension; but he carried away a pair of clean hands, as the voice of a nation witnessed.

II. Having cleared himself, Samuel recounts the outlines of the past, in order to emphasise the law that cleaving to God had ever brought deliverance; departure, disaster; and penitence, restoration. It is history with a purpose, and less careful about chronology than principles. Facts are good, if illuminated by the clear recognition of the law which they obey; but, without that, they are lumber. The 'philosophy of history' is not reached without the plain recognition of the working of the divine will. No doubt the principles which Samuel discerned written as with a sunbeam on the past of Israel were illustrated there with a certainty and directness which belonged to it alone; but we shall make a bad use of the history of Israel, if we say, 'It is all miraculous, and therefore inapplicable to modern national life.' It would be much nearer the mark to say, 'It is all miraculous,

and therefore meant as an exhibition for blind eyes of the eternal principles which govern the history of all nations.' It is as true in Britain to-day as ever it was in Judea, that righteousness and the fear of God are the sure foundations of real national as of individual prosperity. The kingdoms of this world are not the devil's, though diplomatists and soldiers seem to think so. If any nation were to live universally by the laws of God, it might not have what the world calls national success; it would have no story of wholesale robbery, called military glory, but it would have peace within its borders, and life would go nobly and sweetly there. 'Happy is the people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is the people, whose God is the Lord.'

The details of Samuel's *résumé* need not occupy much time. Note the word in verse 7, 'reason,' or, as the Revised Version renders, 'plead.' He takes the position of God's advocate in the suit, and what he will prove for his client is the 'righteousness' of his dealings in the past. The story, says he, can be brought down to very simple elements,—a cry to God, an answer of deliverance, a relapse, punishment, a renewed cry to God, and all the rest of the series as before. It is like a repeating decimal, over and over again, each figure drawing the next after it. The list of oppressors in verse 9, and that of deliverers in verse 11, do not follow the same order, but that matters nothing. Clearly the facts are assumed as well known, and needing only summary reference. The new-fashioned way of treating Biblical history, of course, takes that as an irrefutable proof of the late date and spuriousness of this manufactured speech put into Samuel's mouth. Less omniscient students will be content with accepting the witness to the history. Nobody knows

anything of a judge named Bedan, and the conjectural emendation 'Barak' is probable, especially remembering the roll-call in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah appear in the same order, with the addition of Samson. The supposition that 'Samuel,' in this verse, is an error for 'Samson,' is unnecessary; for the prophet's mention of himself thus is not unnatural, in the circumstances, and is less obtrusive than to have said 'me.'

The retrospect here given points the lesson of the sin and folly of the demand for a king. The old way had been to cry to God in their distresses, and the old experience had been that the answer came swift and sufficient; but this generation had tried a new method, and fear of 'Nahash the Ammonite' had driven them to look for a man to help them. The experience of God's responses to prayer does not always wean even those who receive them from casting about for visible helpers. Still less does the experience of our predecessors keep us from it. Strange that after a hundred plain instances of His aid, the hundred and first distress should find us almost as slow to turn to Him, and as eager to secure earthly stays, as if there were no past of our own, or of many generations, all crowded and bright with tokens of His care! We are always disposed to doubt whether the power that delivered from Sisera, Philistines, and Moab, will be able to deliver us from Nahash. The new danger looks the very worst of all, and this time we must have a king. All the while Israel had God for its king. Our dim eyes cannot see the realities of the invisible world, and so we cleave to the illusions of the visible, which, at their best, are but shadows of the real, and are often made, by our weak hearts, its rival and substitute. What does the soldier, who has an impenetrable armour

to wear, want with pasteboard imitations, like those worn in a play? It is doubtful wisdom to fling away the substance in grasping at the shadow. Saul was brave, and a head and shoulders above the people, and he had beaten Nahash for them; but Saul for God is a poor exchange. Do we do better, when we hanker after something more tangible than an unseen Guide, Helper, Stay, Joy, and Peace-bringer for our hearts, and declare plainly, by our eager race after created good, that we do not reckon God by Himself enough for us?

III. The part of Samuel's address with which we are concerned here closes with the application of the history to the present time. The great point of the last three verses is that the new order of things has not changed the old law, which bound up well-being inseparably with obedience. They have got their king, and there he stands; but if they think that that is to secure their prosperity, they are much mistaken. There is a touch of rebuke, and possibly of sarcasm, in pointing to Saul, and making so emphatic, as in verse 13, the vehemence of their anxiety to get him. It is almost as if Samuel had said, 'Look at him, and say whether he is worth all that eagerness. Do you like him as well, now that you have him, as you did before?' There are not many of this world's goods which stand that test. The shell that looked silvery and iridescent when in the sea is but a poor, pale reminder of its former self, when we hold it dry in our hands. One object of desire, and only one, brings no disappointment in possessing it. He, and only he, who sets his hope on God, will never have to feel that he is not so satisfied with the fulfilment as with the dream.

Israel had rejected God in demanding a king; but the giver of their demand had been God, and their rejection

had not abolished the divine government, nor altered one jot of the old law. They and their king were equally its subjects. There is great emphasis in the special mention of 'your king' as bound to obedience as much as they; and, if we follow the Septuagint reading of verse 15, the mention is repeated there in the threatening of punishment. No abundance of earthly supports or objects of our love or trust in the least alters the unalterable conditions of well-being. Whether surrounded with these or stripped of all, to fear and serve the Lord and to hearken to His voice is equally the requisite for all true blessedness, and is so equally to the helper and the helped, the lover and the loved. We are ever tempted to think that, when our wishes are granted, and some dear or strong hand is stretched out for aid, all will be well; and we are terribly apt to forget that we need God as much as before, and that the way of being blessed has not changed. Those whose hearts and homes are bright with loved faces, and whose lives are guarded by strong and wise hands, have need to remember that they and their dear ones are under the same conditions of well-being as are the loneliest and saddest; and they who 'have none other that fighteth for' them have no less need to remember that, if God be their companion, they cannot be utterly solitary, nor altogether helpless if He be their aid.

OLD TRUTH FOR A NEW EPOCH

'Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye, and also the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. 17. Is it not wheat-harvest

to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. 18. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. 19. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. 20. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; 21. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain. 22. For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people. 23. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. 25. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.—1 SAMUEL xii. 13-25.

SAMUEL'S office as judge necessarily ended when Saul was made king, but his office of prophet continued. This chapter deals with both the cessation and the continuance, giving at first his dignified, and somewhat pained, vindication of his integrity, and then passing on to show him exercising his prophetic function in exhortation, miracle, and authoritative declaration of Jehovah's will.

I. The first point is the sign which Samuel gave. Usually there is no rain in Palestine from about the end of April till October. Samuel was speaking during the wheat harvest, which falls about the beginning of June. We note that he volunteered the sign, and, what is still more remarkable, that he is sure that God will send it in answer to his prayer. Why was he thus certain? Because he recognised that the impulse to proffer the sign came from God. We know little of the mental processes by which a prophet could discriminate between his own thinkings and God's speech, but such discrimination was possible, or there could have been no ring of confidence in the prophet's 'Thus saith the Lord.' Not even a 'Samuel among them that call upon His name' had a right to assume that every asking would certainly have an answer. It is

when we ask 'anything according to His will' that we know that 'He heareth us,' and are entitled to predict to others the sure answer.

It seems a long leap logically from hearing the thunder and seeing the rain rushing down on the harvest field, to recognising the sin of asking for a king. But the connecting steps are plain. Samuel announced the storm, he asked God to send it, it came at his word; therefore he was approved of God and was His messenger; therefore his words about the desire for a king were God's words. Again, God sent the tempest; therefore God ruled the elemental powers, and wielded them so as to affect Israel, and therefore it had been folly and sin to wish for another defender. So the result of the thunder-burst was twofold—they 'feared Jehovah and Samuel,' and they confessed their sin in desiring a king. They were but rude and sense-bound men, like children in many respects; their religion was little more than outward worship and a vague awe; they needed 'signs' as children need picture-books. The very slightness and superficiality of their religion made their confession easy and swift, and neither the one nor the other went deep enough to be lasting. The faith that is built on 'signs and wonders' is easily battered down; the repentance that is due to a thunderstorm is over as soon as the sun comes out again. The shallowness of the contrition in this case is shown by two things,—the request to Samuel to pray for them, and the boon which they begged him to ask, 'that we die not.' They had better have prayed for themselves, and they had better have asked for strength to cleave to Jehovah. They were like Simon Magus cowering before Peter, and beseeching him, 'Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none of the

things which ye have spoken may come upon me.' That is not the voice of true repentance, the 'godly sorrow' which works healing and life, but that of the 'sorrow of the world which worketh death.' The real penitent will press the closer to the forgiving Father, and his cry will be for purity even more than for pardon.

II. Samuel's closing words are tender, wise, and full of great truths. He begins with encouragement blended with reiteration of the people's sin. It is not safe for a forgiven man to forget his sin quickly. The more sure he is that God has forgotten, the more careful he should be to remember it, for gratitude, humility and watchfulness. But it should never loom so large before him as to shut out the sunshine of God's love, for no fruits of goodness will ripen in character without that light. It is a great piece of practical wisdom always to keep one's forgiven sin in mind, and yet not to let it paralyse hopefulness and effort. 'Ye have indeed done all this evil, . . . yet turn not aside from following Jehovah.' That is a truly evangelical exhortation. The memory of past failures is never to set the tune for future service. Again, Samuel based the exhortation to whole-hearted service of Jehovah on Jehovah's faithfulness and great benefits (vs. 22-24). It is suicidal folly to turn away from Him who never turns away from us; it is black ingratitude, as well as suicidal folly, to refuse to serve Him whose mercies encompass us. That divine good pleasure, which has no source but in Himself, flows out like an artesian well, unceasing. His 'nature and property' is to love. His past is the prophecy of His future. He will always be what He has been, and always do what He has done. Therefore we need not fear, though we change

and are faithless. 'He cannot deny Himself.' His revealed character would be dimmed if He abandoned a soul that clung to Him. So our faith should, in some measure, match His faithfulness, and we should build firmly on the firm foundation.

III. Samuel answers the people's request for his prayers with a wise word, full of affection, and also full of dignity and warning, all the more impressive because veiled. He promises his continued intercession, but he puts it as a duty which he owes to God rather than to them only, and he thus sufficiently asserts his God-appointed office. He promises to do more than pray for them; namely, to continue as their ethical and religious guide, which they had not asked him to be. That at once makes his future position in the monarchy clear. He is still the prophet, though no longer the judge, and, as the future was to show, he has to direct monarch as well as people. But it also hints to the people that his prayers for them will be of little avail unless they listen to his teaching. Whether a Samuel prays for us or not, if we do not listen to the voices that bid us serve God, we 'shall be consumed.'

SAUL REJECTED

'Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, 11. It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. 12. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. 13. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord. 14. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 15. And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. 16. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

17. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? 18. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. 19. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? 20. And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. 22. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'
—1 SAMUEL XV. 10-23.

AGAIN the narrative takes us to Gilgal,—a fateful place for Saul. There they 'made Saul king before the Lord'; there he had taken the first step on his dark way of gloomy, proud self-will, down which he was destined to plunge so far and fatally. There he had, in consequence, received the message of the transference of the kingdom from his house, though not from himself. Now, flushed with his victory over Amalek, he has come there with his troops, laden with spoil. They had made a swift march from the south where Amalek dwelt, passing by Nabal's Carmel, where they had put up some sort of monument of their exploit in a temper of vain-glory, very unlike the spirit which reared the stone of help at Eben-ezer; and apparently they purpose sacrifices and a feast. But Samuel comes into camp with no look of congratulation. Probably the vigorous old man had walked that day from his home, some fifteen miles off, and on the way seems to have picked up tidings of Saul's victory and position, which ought to have reached him from the king himself, and would have done so if Saul's conscience had been clear. The omission to tell him was studied neglect, which revealed much.

Samuel had 'cried unto the Lord all night,' if per-

chance the terrible sentence might be reversed; and his cries had not been in vain, for they had brought him into complete submission, and had nerved him to do his work calmly, without a quiver or a pang of personal feeling, as becomes God's prophet.

I. We must go back a step beyond this passage to understand it. Note, first, the command which was disobeyed. The campaign against Amalek was undertaken by express divine direction through Samuel's lips. It was the delayed fulfilment of a sentence passed in the times of the Conquest, but not executed then. The terrible old usages of that period are brought into play again, and the whole nation with its possessions is 'devoted.' The word explains the dreadful usage. There are two kinds of devotion to God: that of willing, and that of unwilling, men; the one brings life, the other, death. The massacre of the foul nations of Canaan was thereby made a direct divine judgment, and removed wholly from the region of ferocious warfare. No doubt, the whole plane of morals in the earlier revelation is lower than that of the New Testament. If Jesus has not taught a higher law than was given to 'them of old time,' one large part of His gift to men disappears. The wholesale destruction of 'babe and suckling' with the guilty makes us shudder; and we are meant to feel the difference between the atmosphere of that time and ours. But we are not meant to question the reality of the divine command, nor His right to give it. He slays, and makes alive. His judgments strike the innocent with the guilty. In many a case, and often, the sin is one generation's, and the bitter fruit another's. The destruction of Canaanites and Amalekites does not change its nature because God used men to do it; and the question is not

whether the Israelites were fiercely barbarous in their warfare, but whether God has the right of life and death. We grant all the dreadfulness, and joyfully admit the distance between such acts and Jesus Christ; but we recognise them as not incongruous with the whole revealed character of the God who is justice as well as love, as parallel in substance, though different in instrument, with many of His dealings with men,—as the execution of righteous sentence on rank corruption, and as sweetening the world by its removal. Most of the difficulty and repugnance has been caused by forgetting that Israel was but the sword, while the hand was God's.

II. Note the disobedience. Partial obedience is complete disobedience. Saul and his men obeyed as far as suited them; that is to say, they did not obey God at all, but their own inclinations, both in sparing the good and in destroying the worthless. What was not worth carrying off they destroyed,—not because of the command, but to save trouble. This one fault seems but a small thing to entail the loss of a kingdom. But is it so? It was obviously not an isolated act on Saul's part, but indicated his growing impatience of the divine control, exercised on him through Samuel. He was in a difficult position. He owed his kingdom to the prophet; and the very condition on which he held it was that of submission to Samuel's authority. No wonder that his elevation quickened the growth of his masterfulness and gloomy, impetuous self-will,—traits in his character which showed themselves very early in his reign! No wonder either that such a king, held in leading-strings by a prophet, should chafe! The more insignificant the act in itself, the more significant it may be as a flag of revolt. Disobedience which will

not do a little thing is great disobedience. Nor was this the first time that Saul had 'kicked,' like another Saul, 'against the pricks.' Gilgal had seen a previous instance of his impetuous self-assertion, masked by apparent deference; and the inference is fair that the interval between the two pieces of rebellion had been of a piece with them. Trivial acts, especially when repeated, show deep-seated evil. There may be only a coil of the snake visible, but that betrays the presence of the slimy folds, though they are covered from sight among the leaves. The tiny shoot of a plant, peeping above the ground, does not augur that the roots are short; they may run for yards. Nor can any act be called small, of which the motive is disregard of God's plain command: 'He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.' Saul had never much religion. He had never heard of Samuel till that day when he came to consult him about the asses. It was a wonder to his acquaintances to find him 'among the prophets'; and all his acts of worship have about them a smack of self, and an exclusive regard to the mere externals of sacrifice, which imply a shallow notion of religion and a spirit unsubdued by its deeper influences.

Such a man habitually acts in disregard of God's will; and that is great sin, though it be manifested in small acts. It is to be remembered, too, that the excepting of the best of the spoil from the general destruction, changed the whole character of the transaction, and brought it down from the level of a solemn act of divine justice, of which Saul and his army were the executors by divine mandate, to that of a mere cattle-lifting foray, in which they were but thieves for their own gain. The mingling of personal advantage with any sort of service of God, ruins the whole, and turns it

into mere selfishness. Samuel, in verse 19, puts the two sides of this 'evil in the sight of the Lord,' as being disobedience and swooping down on the booty, like some bird of prey.

III. Note Saul's excuses. Throughout the whole interview he plays a sorry part, and is evidently cowed by the hated authority and personality of the old man; while Samuel, on his side, is curt, stern, and takes the upper hand, as becomes God's messenger. The relative positions of the two men are the normal ones of their offices, and explain both Saul's revolt and the chronic impatience of kings at the interference of prophets. Here we have Saul coming to meet Samuel with affected heartiness and welcome, and with the bold lie, 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' That is more than true obedience is quick to say. If Saul had done it, he would have been slower to boast of it. 'Those vessels yield the most sound that have the least liquor.' He 'doth protest too much'; and the protestation comes from an uneasy conscience. Or did he, like a great many other men who have no deep sense of the sanctity of every jot and tittle of a divine law, please himself with the notion that it was enough to keep it approximately, in the 'spirit' of the precept, without slavish obedience to the 'letter'? In a later part of the interview (v. 20) he insists that he has obeyed, and tries to prove it by dwelling on the points in which he did so, and gliding lightly over the others.

'Samuel had reason to believe the sheep and oxen above Saul'; and there is a tone of almost contempt for the shuffling liar in his quiet question: 'What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' There was no answering that; so Saul shifts his ground without a blush or a

moment's hesitation. 'The people spared.' It is a new character for him to appear in,—that of a weak ruler who cannot keep his unruly men in order! Had he tried to restrain them? If he had, and had failed, he was not fit to be a king. If he had not, he was a coward to shift the blame on to them. How ready men are to vilify themselves in some other direction, in order to escape the consciousness of sin, which God is seeking to force home on them! No doubt the people were very willing to have a finger in the affair; but so was he. And if the cattle was their share, Agag, who could be held to ransom, was his; and the arrangement suited all round. As to the purpose of sacrificing at Gilgal, perhaps that was true; but if it were, no doubt the same process of selection, which had destroyed the worthless and kept the best, would have been repeated; and the net result would have been a sacrifice of the least valuable, and 'the survival of the fittest' in many a pasture and stall.

But note Saul's attitude towards Jehovah, betrayed by him in that one word: 'the Lord *thy* God.' No wonder that he had been content with a partial and perfunctory obedience, if he had no closer sense of connection with God than that! There is almost a sneer in it, too, as if he had said, 'What needs all this fuss about saving the cattle? You should be pleased; for this Jehovah, with whom you profess to have special communication, will be honoured with sacrifice, and you will share in the feast.' If the words do not mean abjuring Jehovah, they go very near it, and, at all events, betray the shallowness of Saul's religion. Samuel, in his answer, reminds him of his early modesty and self-distrust, and of the source of his elevation. He then sweeps away the flimsy cobwebs of excuses, by

the curt repetition of the plain, dreadful terms of Saul's commission, and then flashes out the piercing question, like a sword, 'Wherefore then didst thou not?' The reminder of past benefits, and the reiteration of the plain injunctions which have been broken, are the way to cut through the poor palliations which men wrap around their sins.

It speaks of a very obstinate and gloomy determination that, in answer, Saul should reiterate his protestation of having done as he was bid. He doggedly says over again all that he had said before, unmoved by the prophet's solemn words. He is steeling his heart against reproof; and there is only one end to that. Sin unacknowledged, after God has disclosed it, is doubly sin. The heart that answers the touch of God's rebukes by sullenly closing more tightly on its evil, is preparing itself for the blow of the hammer which will crush it. 'He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' Let us beware of meeting God's prophet with shuffling lies about our obedience, and of opposing to the words which are loving though they pierce, the armour of impenetrable self-righteousness and conceit.

IV. Note the punishment. To the vain talk about honouring God by sacrifice, Samuel opposes the great principle which was the special message committed to every prophet in Israel, and which was repeated all through its history, side by side with the divinely appointed sacrificial system. In the intensity of his spiritual emotion, Samuel speaks in lyric strains, in the measured parallelism which was the Hebrew dress of poetry, and gives forth in words 'which will live for ever' the great truth that God delights in obedience more

than in sacrifice. Whilst, on the one hand, he lifts the surrender of the will, and the consequent submission of the life, high above all mere ritual, on the other hand, by the same process, he sinks the rebellion of the will and the stubbornness of the nature, unsubdued either by kindness or threats, as Saul was showing his to be, to the level of actual idolatry.

‘Rebellion is divination,
And stubbornness is idols and teraphim.’

Then comes the stern sentence of rejection. Why was Saul thus irrevocably set aside? Was it not a harsh punishment for such a crime? As we have already remarked, Saul's act is not to be judged as an isolated deed, but as the outcome of a deep tendency in him, which meant revolt from God. It was not because of the single act, but because of that which it showed him to be, that he was set aside. The sentence is pronounced, not because ‘thou didst spare Amalek,’ but because ‘thou didst reject the word of the Lord.’ Further, it is to be remembered that the punishment was but the carrying out of his act. His own hand had cut the bond between him and God, and had disqualified himself for the office which he filled. Saul had said, ‘I will reign by myself.’ God said, ‘Be it so! By thyself thou shalt reign.’ For the consequence of his deposition was not outward change in his royalty. David indeed was anointed but in secret, so Samuel consented to honour Saul before the people. All the external difference was that Samuel never saw him again, and he was relieved from the incubus of the prophet's ‘interference’; that is to say, he ceased to be God's king, and became a phantom, ruling only by his own will and power, as he had wished to do. How profound may be the difference while all externals

remain unchanged! When we set up ourselves as our own lords, and shake off God's rule, we cast away His sanction and help in all the deeds of our self-will, however unaltered their outward appearance may remain.

But God left him to 'walk in his own ways, and be filled with the fruit of his own devices,' by no irrevocable abandonment, however the decree of rejection from the kingship was irrevocable. The gates of repentance stood open for him; and the very sentence that came stern and laconic from Samuel's lips, rightly accepted, might have drawn him in true penitence to a forgiving God. His subsequent confession was rejected because it expressed no real contrition; and the worship which he proceeded to offer, without the sanction of the prophet's presence, was as unreal as his protestation of obedience, and showed how little he had learned the lesson of the great words, 'To obey is better than sacrifice.'

THE SHEPHERD-KING

'And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons. 2. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. 3. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee. 4. And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? 5. And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. 6. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. 7. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. 8. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 9. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 10. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. 11. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he

come hither. 12. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. 13. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.—1 SAMUEL xvi. 1-13.

THE chief purpose in these verses is to bring out that the choice of David was purely God's. The most consummate art could have taken no better way of heightening the effect of his first appearance than that adopted in this perfectly unartificial story, which leads us up a long avenue to where the shepherd-boy stands. First, we have Samuel, with his regrets and objections; then Jesse with his seven stalwart sons; and at last, when expectation has been heightened by delay and by the minute previous details, the future king is disclosed,—a stripling with his ruddy locks glistening with the anointing oil, and his lovely eyes. We shall best catch the spirit by simply following the letter of the story.

I. We have Samuel and his errand to Bethlehem. After that sad day at Gilgal, he and Saul met no more, though their homes were but a few miles apart, and it must have been difficult to avoid each other. Samuel yearned over the man whom he had learned to love, and it must have been pain to him to see the shattering of the vessel which he had formed. However natural his mourning, and however indicative of his sweet nature, it was wrong, because it showed that he had not yet reconciled himself to God's purpose, though his conduct obeyed. The mourning which submits while it weeps, and which interferes with no duty, is never rebuked by God. He never says, 'How long dost thou mourn?' unless sorrow has deepened into accusations of His providence, or tears have blinded us to the duty that ensues. But the true cure for overmuch sorrow

is work, and, for vain regrets after vanished good, the welcome to the new good which God ever sends to fill the empty place. His resources are not exhausted because one man has failed. 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' Saul has been rejected, but a king shall be found; and Samuel is to dry his tears and anoint him. He evidently had no thought of a successor to Saul till this command came; and when it comes, how little it tells him! He gets light enough for the next step, but no more. That is always God's way. Duty opens by degrees, and the way to see farther ahead is to go as far as we see.

Samuel's sorrow and the incomplete command show plainly that he was but an instrument. At every step the view is confuted which makes him a far-seeing statesman who inaugurated and carried through a peaceful revolution. The history, which is our only source, tells another story, and makes God the actor, and the prophet only a tool in His hands. If we cut the supernatural out of the story, the fragments do not hang together, and no reason is forthcoming why they should be any more true than are the rejected pieces. Samuel does not show to advantage in either of the two things mentioned about him here. In neither was he true to his early vow, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth.' But there was much reason for his fear, if once God was left out of the account; for Saul's ever-wakeful suspicion had become a disease, and it was not wonderful that he should be on the watch for any act which looked like putting the sentence of deposition into effect. If ever a man lived with a sword hanging by a hair over him, it was this unhappy king, who knew that he was dethroned, and did not know when or by whom the divine rejection would be made visible

to all men. But Samuel had faced worse dangers without a murmur; and no doubt his alarm now, which makes him venture all but flatly to refuse to obey, indicates that, to some extent, he had lost his hold of God by his indulgence in his sorrow. If he had been true to his high calling, he would have 'filled his horn,' and gone on God's errand, careless of a hundred Sauls or a hundred deaths. But it is easy for us, who have never perilled anything for obedience, to sit in judgment on him. 'Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.' God judges him mercifully, and provides a shelter for his weakness, which he should not have needed. To hide his true errand behind the cloak of the sacrifice was second-best, and only permitted in consideration of his fear which had a touch of sin in it. He was not, at the moment, up to treading the heroic plain path; and God opened an easier one for him. It is sometimes allowable to use an avowed purpose to conceal the real one, but it is a permission which should be very sparingly used.

II. We have Samuel at Bethlehem, with Jesse and his sons. An old man is suddenly seen coming up the hill to the gate of the little city on foot, driving or leading a heifer, and carrying a horn in his hand. In such humble fashion did the prophet travel; but reverential awe met him, and his long years of noble service surrounded him as with a halo. Apparently, Bethlehem had not been included in his usual circuits, and the village elders were somewhat scared by his sudden appearance. Their question may give a glimpse into the severity which Samuel sometimes had to show, and is a strange testimony to the reality of his power: 'Comest thou peaceably?' One old man was no very formidable assailant of a village, even if he did not

come with friendly intent; but, if he is recognised as God's messenger, his words are 'sharper than any two-edged sword,' and his unarmed hand bears weapons mighty to 'pull down strongholds.' Why should the elders have thought that he came 'with a rod'? Because they knew that they and their fellow-villagers deserved it. If men were not dimly conscious of sin, they would not be afraid of God's messenger or of God.

The narrative does not tell whether or not the sacrifice preceded the review of Jesse's sons. Probably it did, and the interval between it and the feast was occupied in the interview. It is evident that Samuel kept the reason of his wish to see Jesse's sons to himself; for disclosure would have brought about the danger which he was so anxious to avoid. It appears, too, from verse 13, that only the family of Jesse were present. So we have to fancy the wondering little cluster of burly husbandmen with their father surrounding the prophet, and, one by one, bracing themselves to meet his searching gaze. Again the choice is emphatically represented as God's, by the mention of Samuel's hasty conclusion, from the look of the eldest, that he was the man. Had not Samuel had enough of kings of towering stature? Strange that he should have been in such a hurry to fix on a second edition of Saul! The most obedient waiters on God sometimes outrun His intimations, and they always go wrong when they do. Samuel has to learn two lessons, as he is bidden to repress the too quick thought: one, that he is not choosing, but only registering God's choice; and one, that the qualifications for God's king are inward, not bodily. In these old days, the world's monarchs had to be men of thews and sinews, for power rested on mere brute force; but God's chosen

had to rule, not by the strength of his own arm, but by leaning on God's. The genius of the kingdom determined the principle of selection of its king. Samuel does not again attempt to forecast the choice; but he lets the other six pass, and, hearing no inward voice from God, tells Jesse, as it would seem, that the Lord has not chosen them for whatsoever mysterious purpose was in His mind.

III. We have 'the Lord's chosen.' Samuel was staggered by the apparent failure of his errand. God had told him that he had provided a king from this family, and now they had passed in review before him, and none was chosen. Again he is made to feel his own impotence, and his question, 'Are here all thy children?' has a touch of bewilderment in it. God seldom shows us His choice at first; and both in thought and practice we get at the precious and the true by a process of exclusion, having often to reject 'seven' before we find in some all-but-forgotten 'eighth' that which we seek. David's insignificance in Jesse's eyes was such that his father would never have remembered his existence but for the question, and his answer is a kind of assurance to the prophet that he need not take the trouble to see the boy, for he will never do for whatever he may have in view. His youth and occupation put him out of the question. We know, from the other parts of his story, that his brothers had no love for him; nor does his father seem to have had much. Probably the lad had the usual lot of genius,—to grow up among uncongenial, commonplace people, understanding him little, and liking him less. It is a hard school; but where it does not sour, it makes strong men. His solitary shepherd life taught him many precious lessons, and, at any rate, gave him the price-

less gift of solitude, which is the nurse of poetry, heroism, and religion. The glorious night-piece in Psalm viii., and its companion day-piece in Psalm xix., may bear the impress of the shepherd life; which is idealised and sanctified for ever in the immortal sweetness of Psalm xxiii. There were many worse schools for the future king than a solitary shepherd's life on the bare hills round Bethlehem.

The delay of the feast and the pause of idle waiting heighten the expectation with which we look for David's coming. When he does come, what a bright young figure is lovingly painted for us! He is 'ruddy, and withal fair of eyes, and goodly to look upon,'—of fair complexion, with golden hair (rare among these swarthy Orientals), and with lustrous poet's eyes. What a contrast to Saul's grim face and figure,—like a sunbeam streaming athwart a thunder-cloud seamed with its own lightning! Silently the divine voice spoke, and silently, as it would seem, Samuel poured the oil on the boy's bowed curls. No word of the purpose escaped his lips, and the awestruck youth was left to wonder for what high destiny he was chosen. One can fancy the looks of his brothers as they bitterly watched the anointing with hearts full of envy, contempt, and rage. 1 Samuel xvii. 28 shows what they felt to David.

What was the use of this enigmatical anointing for an undisclosed purpose? It is Samuel's last act, and his last appearance, except for the mention of David's flight to him from the court of Saul, and that weird scene of Saul prophesying and lying naked before Samuel and David for a day and a night. It was therefore the solemn final act of the prophet,—transferring the monarchy; but it was for David the beginning of his training for the throne, in two ways.

‘The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.’ There was an actual communication of divine gifts fitting him for his unknown office, and he was conscious of a new spirit stirring in him. Beside this, the consciousness of a call to unknown tasks would mature him fast, and bring graver thoughts, humbler sense of weakness, and clinging trust in God who had laid the burden on him; and the necessity for repressing his dreams of the future, in order to do his obscure present duties, would add patience and self-control to his youthful ardour. What a whirl of thoughts he carried back to his flock, and how welcome would the solitude be!

The great lesson here is the one so continually reiterated in Scripture, from Isaac downwards, that God ‘chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty,’ and thereby magnifies both the sovereign freedom of His choice and the power of His Spirit, which takes the stripling from the sheepcotes and qualifies him to be the antagonist of the grim Saul, and the king of Israel. There are subsidiary lessons, especially for young and ardent souls confined for the present to lowly tasks, and feeling some call to something higher in a dim future. Patience, the faithful doing of to-day’s trivial tasks, the habit of self-repression, the quiet trust in God who opens the way in due time,—these, and such like, were the signs that David was called to a throne, and that God’s Spirit was preparing him for it. They are the virtues which will best prepare us for whatever the future may have in store for us, and will be in themselves abundant reward, whether they draw after them a high position, which is a heavy burden, or, more happily, leave us in our sheltered obscurity.

THE VICTORY OF UNARMED FAITH

'And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. 33. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. 34. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; 35. And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. 36. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. 37. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee. 38. And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. 39. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go: for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. 40. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. 41. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. 42. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. 43. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. 45. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. 46. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. 47. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands. 48. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hastened, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. 49. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. 50. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. 51. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.'—1 SAMUEL xvii. 32-51.

THE scene of David's victory has been identified in the present Wady Es-Sunt, which still possesses one of the terebinth-trees which gave it its name of 'Elah.' At that point it is about a quarter of a mile wide, and runs nearly east and west. In the centre is 'a deep trench or gulley, the sides and bed of which are strewn

with rounded and water-worn pebbles.' This is the 'valley,' or rather 'ravine' of verse 3 of this chapter, which is described by a different word from that for 'vale' in verse 2—the one meaning a much broader opening than the other—and from it came the 'five smooth stones.' Notice the minute topographical accuracy, which indicates history, not legend. The pebble-bed may supply a missile to hit the modern 'giant' of sceptical criticism, who boasts much after Goliath's fashion.

The two armies lay looking at each other across the valley, with occasional skirmishes; and for forty days (probably a round number) Goliath paraded on his own, the south, side of the gulley, shouting out his taunts and challenge with a voice like a bull. Many a similar scene in classical and mediæval warfare confirms the truth of the picture, so unlike modern battles. The story is, for all time, the example of the victory of unarmed faith over the world's utmost might. It is in little the history of the Church and the type of all battles for God. It is a pattern for the young especially. The youthful athlete leaps into the arena, and overcomes, not because of his own strength, but because he trusts in God.

I. Note the glowing youthful enthusiasm which dares the conflict. When the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, his courage seems to have gone too, and he is cowed, like the rest, by Goliath. His interview with David shows him as timid and unlike his former self, when he dashed at Nahash and any odds. Now he is hardly to be roused, even by David's contagious boldness, and is full of objections and precautions. The temper of the two, as they front each other in Saul's tent, shows that the one has lost, and the other received, the Spirit

which strengthens. David has become the encourager, and his cheery words bring some hopefulness to the gloomy, faint-hearted king. The Septuagint has a variant reading in verse 32, which brings this out and suits the context, 'Let not my lord's heart fail.' But, whether this be adopted or no, David appears as quite unaffected by the terror which had unmanned the army, and as bringing a buoyant disregard of the enemy, like a reviving breeze. It was not merely youthful daring, nor foolish under-estimation of the danger, which prompted his stimulating words. The ring of true faith is in them, and they show us how we may surround ourselves with an atmosphere which will keep prevailing faint-heartedness off us, and make us, like Gideon's fleece, impervious to the chill mists of faithless fear which saturate all around. He who trusts in God should be as a pillar of fire, burning bright in the darkness of terror, and making a rallying point for weaker hearts. When panic has seized others, the Christian soul has the more reason for courage. David conquered the temptation to share in the general cowardice, before he conquered Goliath, and perhaps the former fight was the worse of the two.

While David is the embodiment of the courage of faith, Saul embodies worldly wisdom and calculating prudence. A touch of tenderness blends with his attempt to dissuade the lad from the unequal conflict. He speaks of probabilities, and, like all such calculation, his results are quite right, only that he has not taken all the forces into account, and the omission vitiates the conclusion. It is quite true that David is but a youth, and Goliath a giant and a veteran; but is that all that is to be said? If it be, then the lad cannot fight the Philistine bully; but if Saul has made the

small omission of leaving out God, that makes a difference. The same mistake is constantly made still, and so the victories of faith are a constant surprise to the world and to a worldly Church. David's eager story of his fights with wild beasts is meant both to answer Saul's objection on his own ground, by showing him that, youth as the speaker was, he had proved his power, and still more to supply the lacking element in the calculation. So he tells, first, how 'I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him,' and then at the end brings in the true ground of his confidence: 'The Lord that delivered me . . . He will deliver.' As Thomas Fuller says, 'He made an experimental syllogism, and from most practical premises (major a lion, minor a bear,) inferred the direct conclusion that God would give him victory over Goliath.' Faith has the right thus to argue from the past to the future, because it draws from God whose resources and patience are equally inexhaustible. An echo of the words comes from Paul's 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver.' There is infinite pathos in Saul's parting blessing. 'The Lord be with thee!' is spoken as if from the consciousness that the Lord had left *him*, and that *his* day for going into battle with the assurance of His help was gone for ever. If that softened mood had lasted, how different his future might have been! If we modestly and boldly show the power of faith in our lives, we may kindle yearnings in some gloomy hearts, that would lead them to peace, if followed out.

II. The equipment of faith. Saul meant to honour as well as to secure David by dressing him in his own royal attire, and by encumbering him by the help of

sword and helmet. And David was willing to be so fitted out, for it is no part of the courage of faith to disdain any outward helps. But he soon found that he could not move freely in the unaccustomed armour, and flung it off, like a wise man. His motive was partly common sense, which told him not to choose weapons that his antagonist could handle better than he; and partly reliance on God, which told him that he was safer with no armour but his shepherd's dress and with only his sling in his hand. So there he stands, drawn for us with wonderful vividness, in one hand his staff, in the other his sling, both familiar and often used, and by his side the simple wallet which had held his frugal meal, and now received the smooth pebbles that he picked up as he passed the gulley to the Philistine side of the valley.

How graphically the contrast is drawn between him and Goliath, as the latter comes forth swelling with his own magnificence, and preceded by his shield-bearer! He was 'brass' all over; note the kind of amused emphasis with which the word is repeated in the half-satirical and marvellously lifelike portrait of him in verses 5-8; 'brass' here, 'brass' there, 'brass' everywhere; and, not content with one shield dangling at his back, he has a man to carry another in front of him as he struts. David seems to have crossed the ravine, and to have come close up to Goliath before he was observed; and then, with almost a snort of contempt, the giant resents the insult of sending such a foe to fight *him* with such weapons. Perhaps he was nearer the truth than he thought, when he asked if he was a dog; and any stick will do, as the proverb says, to beat that animal, especially if God guards the hand that holds it.

The five smooth stones have become the symbol of

the insignificant means, in the world's estimate, which God uses in faithful hands to slay the giants of evil. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty. Faith unarmed is armed with more than triple steel, and a sling in its hand is more fatal than a sword. Sometimes in kindness and sometimes in malice, the world tempts us to fight evil with its own weapons, and to put on its unfamiliar armour. The Church as a whole, and individual Christians, have often been hampered, and all but smothered, in Saul's harness. The more simply we keep ourselves to the simple methods which the word of God enjoins, and to the simple weapons which ought to be the easiest for a Christian, the more likely shall we be to conquer. Goliath is not to be encountered with sword and armour which is, after all, but a shabby copy of the tons of brass which he wears, but he does not know what to make of the sling, and does not see the stone till it crashes his skull in.

III. Note faith's anticipation of victory. The dialogue before the battle has many parallels in classical times and among savage peoples. Goliath's bluster is full of contempt of David and truculent self-confidence. Its coarseness is characteristic,—he will make his boyish antagonist food for vultures and jackals. It is exactly what a bully would say. David's answer throbs with buoyant confidence, and stands as a stimulating example of the temper in which God's soldiers should go out to every fight, no matter against what odds. It fully recognises the formidable armoury of the enemy,—sword for close quarters, spear to thrust with, and javelin to fling from a distance, every weapon that ingenuity could fashion and trained skill could wield. Goliath was a walking arsenal, and little

David took count of his weapons as they clanked and flashed. It is no part of faith's triumph to ignore the number and sharpness of the enemy's arms. But faith sees them all, and keeps unterrified and unashamed of the poor leathern sling and smooth stones. The unarmed hand which grasps God's hand should never tremble; and he who can say 'I come . . . in the name of the Lord of hosts,' has no need to be afraid of an army of Goliaths, though each bristled with swords and spears like a porcupine.

The great name on which David's faith rested, 'the Lord of hosts,' appears to have sprung into use in this epoch, and to have been one precious fruit of its frequent wars. Conflict is blessed if it teaches the knowledge of the unseen Commander who marshals not only men, but all the forces of the universe and the armies of heaven, for the defence of His servants and the victory of His own cause. The fulness of the divine name is learned by degrees, as our needs impress the various aspects of His character; and the revelation contained in this appellation is the gift of that fierce and stormy time, a possession for ever. He who defies the armies of Israel has to reckon with the Lord of these armies, whose name proclaims at once His eternal, self-originated, and self-sustained being, His covenant, His presence with His earthly host, and the infinite ranks of obedient creatures who are His soldiers and their allies. That is 'the Name' in the strength of which we may 'set up our banners' and be sure of victory. Note how David flings back Goliath's taunts in his teeth. He is sure that God will conquer through him, and, though he has no sword, that he will somehow hack the big head off; and that it is the host of the Philistines on whom the vultures and jackals are to feed to-day.

His faith sees the victory before the battle is begun, and trusts, not in his own weak power, but only 'in the name of the Lord.' Note, too, the result which he expects—no glory for himself, though that came unsought, when the shrill songs from the women of Israel met the victors, but to all the world the proof that Israel had a God, and to Israel ('this assembly') the renewed lesson of their true weapons and of their Almighty Helper. Such utter suppression of self is inseparable from trust in God, and without it no soldier of His has a right to expect victory. To fight 'in the name of the Lord' requires hiding our own name. If we are really going to war for Him, and in His strength, we ought to expect to conquer. Believe that you will be beaten, and you will be. Trust to Him to make you 'more than conquerors,' and the trust will bring about its own fulfilment.

IV. Observe the contrast in verse 48 between the slow movements of the heavy-armed Philistine and the quick run of the shepherd, whose 'feet were as hind's feet' (Psalm xviii. 33). Agility and confident alacrity were both expressed. His feet were shod with 'the preparedness of faith.' Observe, too, the impetuous brevity of the account in verse 49, of the actual fall of Goliath. The short clauses, coupled by a series of 'ands,' reproduce the swift succession of events, which ended the fight before it had begun; and one can almost hear the whiz of the stone as it crashes into the thick head, so strangely left unprotected by all the profusion of brass that clattered about him. The vulnerable heel of Achilles and the unarmed forehead of Goliath illustrate the truth, ever forgotten and needing to be repeated, that, after all precautions, some spot is bare, and that 'there is no armour against fate.'

The picture of the huge 'man-mountain' fallen upon his face to the earth, a huddled heap of useless mail, recalls the words of a psalm, 'When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell' (Psalm xxvii. 2). Is it fanciful to hear in that triumphant chant an echo of Goliath's boast about giving his flesh to the fowls and the beasts, and a vision of the braggart as he tottered and lay prostrate? Observe, too, the contemptuous reiteration of 'the Philistine,' which occurs six times in the four verses (48-51). National feeling speaks in that. There is triumph in the sarcastic repetition of the dreaded name in such a connection. This was what one of the brood had got, and his fate was an omen of what would befall the rest. The champion of Israel, the soldier of God, standing over the dead Philistine, all whose brazen armour had been useless and his brazen insolence abased, and sawing off his head with his own sword, was a prophecy for the Israel of that day, and will be a symbol till the end of time of the true equipment, the true temper, and the certain victory, of all who, in the name of the Lord of hosts, go forth in their weakness against the giants of ignorance, vice, and sin. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

'And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war; and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants. 6. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. 7. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. 8. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to

me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? 9. And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. 10. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. 11. And Saul cast the javelin: for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. 12. And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul. 13. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14. And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. 15. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.'—1 SAMUEL xviii. 5-16.

VERSE 5 anticipates verses 13-16. It is the last verse of a section which interrupts the even flow of the story, and which is absent from the Septuagint. Verse 6 follows immediately on xvii. 54 in that version. Taking that verse as our starting-point, we have three stages in Saul's growing hatred and awe of the young champion, and of David's growing influence and reputation. It is deeply tragic to watch the gradual darkening of the once bright light, side by side with the irresistible increase in brilliance of the new star. 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' became Saul's bitter conviction; but instead of meekly accepting the necessity, his gloomy spirit struggled against it, like stormy waves against a breakwater, and, like them, was shivered into foam in the vain effort.

I. The first stage was Saul's jealousy of David's fame as a warrior. The returning victorious army was met, in Oriental fashion, by a triumphal chorus of women, with their shrill songs, accompanied by the dissonant noises which do duty for music to Eastern ears. The words of their chant were startlingly and ominously plain-spoken, and became more emphatic and insulting in Saul's ears, because they were sung by two answering bands, one of which rang out, 'Saul hath slain his thousands,' while the other overtopped them by peal-

ing out still more loudly and exultantly, 'And David his ten thousands.' To be brought into comparison with this unknown stripling was bitter enough, but to be used as a foil to set off his superiority was too much to be borne. There are few men, holding high places in any walk of life, who could have stood such a comparison without wincing. Suppose a great soldier in our day, coming home from a successful campaign, and having his prowess dimmed in every newspaper by the praises lavished on a young lieutenant who had done some brave feat that caught the public fancy—would he be likely to be in a very amiable mood towards either the singers or the object of their triumphal songs? Do great authors rejoice in the rising of young reputations that dim theirs? or do great orators smile when some 'boy' takes the public ear more than they do? Poor Saul had to drink the bitter cup, which all who love the sweet draught of popular applause have sooner or later to taste; and we need not think him a monster of badness because he found it bitter.

It will be more to the purpose that we take care lest we do the very same thing in our little lives and humble spheres; for envy and jealousy of those who threaten to out-shine, or in any way to out-do, us is not confined to people in high places or with great reputations. The roots of them are in us all, and the only way to keep them from growing up rank is to think less of our reputation and more of our duty, to count it a very small matter what men think of us, and the all-important matter what God thinks.

Saul was moved, too, by the consciousness that he had been really deposed by Jehovah, and was only a phantom king, and, as his angry soliloquy shows, what troubled him most in the women's song was that it

pointed to David as likely to come in and rob him, not only of glory, but of the kingdom. Ever since Samuel had pronounced his rejection, his uneasy eyes had been furtively scanning men for his possible supplanter, and no wonder that his gloomy suspicions focussed themselves on the gallant youth, who conquered men's hearts and made women's tongues eloquent in his praise. Stormy and dark as Saul's nature had become, and grave as had been his failure to be worthy of the monarchy, one cannot but feel the infinite pathos and pity of his life.

II. The second stage was the attempt on David's life. Verses 10 and 11, which record it, are not in the Septuagint, and the narrative does run more smoothly without them. But if they are retained, they show how the moody suspicion with which Saul 'eyed David' came to a swift, murderous climax. He stands as a terrible example of how suspicion and jealousy, working in a nature utterly without self-control, transport it into the wildest excesses. In the strange phraseology of verse 9, 'an evil spirit from God' laid hold of him, dominating his personality. The writer of this book felt that God was the ultimate cause of all things, and that all beings were under His control; and his devout recognition of that fact led him to the apparent paradox of tracing an 'evil spirit' to God. But we must not be so startled as to overlook the truth that Saul had prepared the fit abode for that evil spirit by his own indulgence in a whirl of sinful passions and acts, and that these were punished by their 'natural' consequence. Any man who lets his own baser nature have full fling invites the devil. Saul had what would now be called a paroxysm of insanity. But perhaps the modern medical phrase is not to be preferred to the old

scriptural one. The former is innocent of any explanation of the fact which it designates, and it may possibly be that insanity is sometimes, even now, 'possession.' At all events, since science gives no explanation of it, and a great dim region of consciousness is now being recognised,—'subliminal,' to speak in the new phraseology,—he is a bold man who ventures to deny that possibility.

But be that as it may, what a striking picture is given of Saul, worn with passion and swept away by ungovernable impulses, 'prophesying' or 'raving' with wild gestures and uttering wilder sounds; and of David, young, calm, giving forth melodies on his harp and songs from his lips, that sought to soothe the paroxysms of fury. Browning has drawn the picture in immortal words, which all who can should read. It has been suggested that Saul did not 'cast' his spear, but only brandished it in his fierce threat to pin David to the wall. But the youthful harper would scarcely have 'avoided out of his presence' for a mere threat and the flourish of a lance; and a man, raging mad and madly hostile, would not be likely to waste breath in mere threats. The attempt was more probably a serious one, and the spear, flung by an arm made stronger than ever by insane hatred, quivered in the wall very near the lithe athlete who had agilely escaped it. Envy, allowed to have its way, becomes murderous. Let us suppress its beginning. A tiger pup can be held in and its claws cut, but a full-grown tiger cannot.

III. The third stage is Saul's getting rid of David. The growing awe of him is marked in verses 12 and 15, and the word in the latter verse is stronger than that in the former. It is a pathetic picture of the gradual creeping over a strong man of a nameless terror.

Ever-thickening folds of cold dread, like a wet mist, wrap a soul once bright and energetic. And the reason is twofold: first, that God had left that tempestuous, rebellious soul because it had left Him; and second, that, in its desolate solitude, in which there was no trace of softening or penitence, that lightning-riven soul knew that the sunshine, which it had repelled, was now pouring on David. Saul's suspicions were hardened into certainties. He was sure now that what his jealousy had whispered, when the women chanted their chorus, was grim fact. And he could but helplessly watch his supplanter's steady advance in favour with men and God. The two processes of growing darkness and growing light go on side by side in the two men, and each makes the other more striking by contrast. Twice is it repeated that Saul was in awe of David. Twice is it repeated that Jehovah was with David, and that he 'behaved himself wisely,' which last statement includes in the Hebrew word both the idea of prudence and that of success. So, on the one hand, there is a steady growth in all good, godly, and happy qualities and experiences; and on the other, a tragical increase of darkness and gloom, godlessness and despair. And yet Saul had begun so well! And Saul might have been what David was,—companied by God, prosperous, and the idol of his people. Two souls stand side by side for a moment on the same platform, with the same divine goodness and love encircling them, and the one steadily rises, while the other steadily sinks. How awful are the endless possibilities of progress in either direction that lie open for every soul of man!

JONATHAN, THE PATTERN OF FRIENDSHIP

'And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? 2. And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. 3. And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. 4. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee. 5. And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. 6. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. 7. If he say thus, it is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. 8. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldst thou bring me to thy father? 9. And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee? 10. Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? 11. And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field. 12. And Jonathan said unto David, O Lord God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to-morrow any time, or the third day, and behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; 13. The Lord do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the Lord be with thee, as He hath been with my father.'—1 SAMUEL xx. 1-13.

THE friendship of Jonathan for David comes like a breath of pure air in the midst of the heavy-laden atmosphere of hate and mad fury, or like some clear fountain sparkling up among the sulphurous slag and barren scorixæ of a volcano. There is no more beautiful page in history or poetry than the story of the passionate love of the heir to the throne for the young champion, whom he had so much cause to regard as a rival. What a proof of the victory of love over self is his saying, 'Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee'! (1 Samuel xxiii. 17). Truly did David sing in his elegy, 'Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women';

for in that old world, in which the relations between the sexes had not yet received the hallowing and refinement of Christian times, much of what is now chiefly found in these was manifested in friendship, such as that of these two young men. Jonathan is the foremost figure in it, and the nobility and self-oblivion of his love are beautifully brought out, while David's part is rather that of the loved than of the lover. The scene is laid in Gibeah, where Saul kept his court, and to which all the persons of the story seem to have come back from Samuel's house at Ramah. Saul's strange subjugation to the hallowing influences of the prophet's presence had been but momentary and superficial; and it had been followed by a renewed outburst of the old hate, obvious to David's sharpened sight, though not to Jonathan. In the interview between them, David is pardonably but obviously absorbed in self, while Jonathan bends all his soul to cheer and reassure his friend.

There are four turns in the conversation, in each of which David speaks and Jonathan answers. David's first question presupposes that his friend knows that his death is determined, and is privy to Saul's thoughts. If he had been less harassed, he would have done Jonathan more justice than to suppose him capable of knowing everything without telling him anything; but fear is suspicious. He should have remembered that, when Saul first harboured murderous purposes, Jonathan had not waited to be asked, but had disclosed the plot to him, and perilled his own life by his remonstrances with his father. He should have trusted his friend. His question breathes consciousness of innocence of any hostility to Saul, but unconsciously betrays some defect in his confidence in

Jonathan. The answer is magnanimous in its silence as to that aspect of the question, though the subsequent story seems to imply that Jonathan felt it. He tries to hearten David by strong assurances that his life is safe. He does not directly contradict David's implication that he knew more than he had told, but, without asserting his ignorance, takes it for granted, and quietly argues from it the incorrectness of David's suspicions. Incidentally he gives us, in the picture of the perfect confidence between Saul and himself, an inkling of how much he had to sacrifice to his friendship. Wild as was Saul's fury when aroused, and narrow as had been his escape from it at an earlier time (1 Samuel xiv. 44), there was yet love between them, and the king made a confidant of his gallant eldest son. They 'were lovely and pleasant in their lives.' However gloomy and savage in his paroxysms Saul was, the relations between them were sweet. The most self-introverted and solitary soul needs some heart to pour itself out to, and this poor king found one in Jonathan. All the harder, then, was the trial of friendship when the trusted son had to take the part of the friend whom his father deemed an enemy, and had the pain of breaking such close ties. How his heart must have been torn asunder! On the one side was the lonely father who clung to him: on the other, the hunted friend to whom he clung. It is a sore wrench when kindred are on one side, and congeniality and the voice of the heart on the other. But there are ties more sacred than those of flesh and blood; and the putting of them second, which is sometimes needful in obedience to earthly love or duty, is always needful if we would rightly entertain our heavenly Friend.

Jonathan's soothing assurances did not satisfy David, and he 'sware' in the earnestness of his conviction. David gives a very good reason for his friend's ignorance, which he has at once believed, in the suggestion that Saul had not taken him into his confidence, out of tenderness to his feelings. Their friendship, then, was notorious, and, indeed, was an element in Saul's dread of David, who seemed to have some charm to steal hearts, and had bewitched both Saul's son and his daughter, thus making a painful rift in the family unity. It does not appear how David came to be so sure of Saul's designs. The incident at Ramah might have seemed to augur some improvement in his mood; and certainly there could have been no overt acts, or Jonathan could not have disputed the suspicions. Possibly some whispers may have reached David through his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, or in the course of his attendance on the king, which he had now resumed, his quick eye may have noticed ominous signs. At all events, he is so sure, that he makes solemn attestation to his friend, and convinces him that, in the picturesque phrase which has become so familiar, 'There is but a step between me and death.' Such temper was scarcely in accordance with 'the prophecies which went before on' him. If he had been walking by faith, he would have called Samuel's anointing to mind, and have drawn arguments from the victory over Goliath, for trust in victory over Saul, as he had done for the former from that over the lion and the bear. But faith does not always keep high-water mark, and we can only too easily sympathise with this momentary ebb of its waters.

None the less is it true that David's terror was unworthy, and showed that the strain of his anxious

position was telling on his spirit, and making him not only suspect his earthly friend, but half forget his heavenly One. There was but a step between him and death; but, if he had been living in the serenity of trust, he would have known that the narrow space was as good as a thousand miles, and that Saul could not force him across it, for all his hatred and power.

Jonathan does not attempt to alter his conviction and probably is obliged to admit the justice of the explanation of his own ignorance and the truth of the impression of Saul's purposes. But he does what is more to the purpose; he pledges himself to do whatever David desires. It is an unconditional desertion of his father and alliance with David; it is the true voice of friendship or love, which ever has its delight in knowing and doing the will of the beloved. It answers David's thoughts rather than his words. He will not discuss any more whether he or David is right; but, in any event, he is his friend's.

The touchstone of friendship is practical help and readiness to do what the friend wishes. It is so in our friendships here, which are best cemented so. It is so in the highest degree in our friendship with the true Friend and Lover of us all, the sweetness and power of our friendship with whom we do not know until we say, 'Whatsoever thou desirest, I will do it,' and so lose the burden of self-will, and find that He does for us what we desire when we make His desires our law of conduct.

Secure of Jonathan's help, David proposed the stratagem for finding out Saul's disposition, which had probably been in his mind all along. It says more for his subtlety than for his truthfulness. With all his nobility, he had a streak of true Oriental craft.

and stood on the moral level of his times and country, in his readiness to eke out the lion's skin with the fox's tail. It was a shrewd idea to make Saul betray himself by the way in which he took David's absence; but a lie is a lie, and cannot be justified, though it may be palliated, by the straits of the liar. At the same time it is fair to remember the extremity of David's danger and the morality of his age, in estimating, not the nature of his action, but the extent of his guilt in doing it. The same relaxation of the vigour of his faith which left him a prey to fear, led him to walk in crooked paths, and the impartial narrative tells of them without a word of comment. We have to form our own estimate of the fitness of a lie to form the armour of a saint. The proposal informs us of two facts,—the custom of having a feast for three days at the new moon, and that of having an annual family feast and sacrifice, neither of which is prescribed in the law. I do not here deal with the grave question as to the date of the ceremonial law, as affected by these and similar phenomena; but I may be allowed the passing remark that the irregularities do not prove the non-existence of the law, but may be accounted for by supposing that, in such unsettled times, it had been loosely observed, and that many accretions and omissions, some of them inevitable in the absence of a recognised centre of worship, had crept in. That is a much less brilliant and much more old-fashioned explanation than the new one, but perhaps it is none the worse for that. This generation is fond of making 'originality' and 'brilliancy' the tests of truth.

David's words in verse 8 have a touch of suspicion in them, in their very appeal for kind treatment, in

their reminder of the 'covenant' of friendship, as if Jonathan needed either, and still more in the bitter request to slay him himself instead of delivering him to Saul. He almost thinks that Jonathan is in the plot, and means to carry him off a prisoner. Note, too, that he does not say, 'We made a covenant,' but 'Thou hast brought me into' it, as if it had been the other's wish rather than his. All this was beneath true friendship, and it hurt Jonathan, who next speaks with unusual emotion, beseeching David to clear all this fog out of his heart, and to believe in the genuineness and depth of his love, and in the frankness of his speech. True love 'is not easily provoked,' is not soon angry, and his was true in spite of many obstacles which might have made him as jealous as his father, and in the face of misconstruction and suspicion. May we not think of a yet higher love, which bears with our suspicions and faithless doubts, and ever answers our incredulity by its gentle 'If it were not so, I would have told you'?

David is not yet at the end of his difficulties, and next suggests, how is he to know Saul's mind? Jonathan takes him out into the privacy of the open country (they had apparently been in Gibeah), and there solemnly calls God to witness that he will disclose his father's purposes, whatever they are. The language is obscure and broken, whether owing to corruption in the text, or to the emotion of the speaker. In half-shaped sentences, which betray how much he felt his friend's doubts, and how sincere he was, he invokes evil on himself if he fails to tell all. He then unfolds his ingenious scheme for conveying the information, on which we do not touch. But note the final words of Jonathan,—that prayer, so pathetic, so un-

selfish in its recognition of David as the inheritor of the kingdom that had dropped from his own grasp, so sad in its clear-eyed assurance of his father's abandonment, so deeply imbued with faith in the divine word, and so resigned to its behests. Both in the purity of his friendship and in the strength of his faith and submission, Jonathan stands here above David, and is far surer than the latter himself is of his high destiny and final triumph. It was hard for him to believe in the victory which was to displace his own house, harder still to rejoice in it, without one trace of bitterness mingling in the sweetness of his love, hardest of all actively to help it and to take sides against his father; but all these difficulties his unselfish heart overcame, and he stands for all time as the noblest example of human friendship, and as not unworthy to remind us, as from afar off and dimly, of the perfect love of the Firstborn Son of the true King, who has loved us all with a yet deeper, more patient, more self-sacrificing love. If men can love one another as Jonathan loved David, how should they love the Christ who has loved them so much! And what sacrilege it is to pour such treasures of affection at the feet of dear ones here, and to give so grudgingly such miserable doles of heart's love to Him!

LOVE FOR HATE, THE TRUE *QUID PRO QUO*

'And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. 5. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. 6. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord. 7. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. 8. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My Lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed

himself. 9. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? 10. Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. 11. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee: yet thou huntest my soul to take it. 12. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 13. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 14. After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. 15. The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand. 16. And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. 17. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.'—1 SAMUEL xiv. 4-17.

A SUDDEN Philistine invasion had saved David, when hard pressed by Saul, and had given him the opportunity of flight to the wild country on the west of the Dead Sea, near the place where En-Gedi ('the Fountain of the Wild Goat') sparkles into light on the hill above the weird lake. In these savage gorges Saul's three thousand men would be of little use against the light-footed outlaw and his troop. The whole district is seamed with ravines, and these are honeycombed with great caverns, where dangerous outcasts still lurk and defy capture. Travellers go into raptures over the beauty of some of these 'fairy grottoes' draped with maiden-hair fern, cool and moist, and blessedly dark after the fierce light outside. In some one of these the beautiful story which makes our lesson occurred.

I. We have the scene in the cave. The interior would be black as night to one looking inward with eyes fresh from the blinding glare of such sunlight upon limestone, but it would hold a glimmering twilight for one looking outward, with eyes accustomed to the gloom. David and his men, keeping close to the walls and hiding behind angles, might well be unobserved by Saul at the mouth, and probably never

looking in at all. How vividly the whispered eagerness of the outcasts round David is reproduced! They think it would be 'tempting Providence' to let such a chance slip. They put a religious varnish on their advice. It would be almost impious not to kill Saul, for here was the hand of God evidently fulfilling a prophecy! There may have been some unrecorded prediction of the sort which they seem to quote; but more probably they are only referring to David's designation to the crown, which they had come to know. It never struck them as possible that it could 'seem good' to a wise man not to cut his enemy's throat when he could do it without danger to himself. So they would watch David stealing down quietly to the place where the unconscious king was crouching, and getting close behind him, knife in hand. How disgusted they must have been when the blade, that flashed for a moment in the light at the cave's mouth, was not buried in Saul's great back, but only hacked off the end of his robe spread out behind him! No personal animosity was in David. However he had been driven to consort with outlaws, and to live a kind of freebooter's life, his natural sweetness was unspoiled, and was reinforced by solemn veneration for the sanctity of the Lord's anointing, which he revered all the more because himself had received it. He clambered back to his disappointed men, and, as soon as he was up in the dark again, his chivalry and his religion made him ashamed of his coarse practical jest. The humour of the thing had tempted him to do it; but it was a rude insult, which lowered him more than it did Saul, and, like a true man, he blushes there in the gloom at what he has done. Then he has to defend himself to his men for not coming up to their expectations, and

he does it by insisting on the sacredness which still surrounded Saul as 'the Lord's anointed.' David knew that the unhappy king had been rejected and forsaken by 'the Spirit of the Lord,' and that he himself was the true bearer of the regal unction; but he will not take the law into his own hands, and still regards Saul as his 'lord.' He sets the example, much needed by us all, of leaving God to carry out His purposes at His own time, and patiently waiting till that time comes. He had hard work to keep his men from rushing down on the king; but, having commanded himself, is able to restrain them. How many virtues may be in exercise in one action! Here we have generosity, clemency, sensitiveness of conscience, reverence, self-abnegation, patience, loyalty, firmness, sway over lower natures for high ends,—a whole constellation shining star-like in the dark cavern.

II. We have, next, David's pathetic remonstrance. Saul was alone, and David could easily escape among the cliffs, if the king summoned his men; but he risks capture, in the gush of ancient friendship. His words are full of nobleness, and his silence is no less so. He has no reproaches, no anger nor hate. He will not even suppose that Saul has followed his own impulses in his persecution, but assumes that he has been led astray by calumnies. He points to the fragment of Saul's robe in his hand as the disproof of the lie that he had designs against him, and passionately asserts his innocence now and in all the past. He compares himself to some timid wild thing, like one of the goats among the cliffs, and Saul to a hunter. He solemnly calls God to judge between them, and appeals from the slanders and misjudgings of men to the perfect tribunal of God, to whom he commits his cause. He abjures all

intention of striking at Saul in his own defence. He quotes, in true Eastern manner, a scrap of proverbial wisdom, which contains the homely truth that character determines action; for it needs a wicked man to do a wicked thing, and he implies that he is not wicked, and that Saul knows that well enough,—by what has just happened, if by nothing else. Then he puts his own insignificance and the disproportion between him and his ragged band and the imposing force of Saul in vivid light by his half-humorous and wholly humble description of himself as a ‘dead dog,’ and a ‘flea’; as harmless as the one, as hard to catch as the other, as little important as either. Finally, he reiterates his devout reference of the whole cause to God, and his fixed resolution to take no steps to right himself, but to leave all to Him.

So ought we to deal with slanders and enmity. The eternal law for us in all opposition and hostility is enshrined in David’s noble words and deeds. To repay evil with benefits, to abstain from retaliation when it is in our power, to keep our tongues from bitter and wounding words, to appeal to the adversary’s better self, even at the cost of our own ‘dignity,’—all that is not easy nor usual among professing Christians. But it ought to be. David’s Lord, ‘when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.’ We are poor followers of Him, if David surpasses us in patience and magnanimity. It has taken nineteen hundred years to teach us that passive endurance is more heroic than fighting for our own hand, and that repaying scorn and hate with their like is less noble than meeting them with endless forgiveness.

Psalm vii. is all but universally regarded as David’s, and as belonging to this period. In it we find a clause,

'I have delivered him that without cause was mine enemy,' which may fairly be supposed to refer to the scene in the cave, and we read the same vehement protestations of innocence, the same figure of himself as a hunted wild animal, the same appeal to God's judgment, as in his remonstrance with Saul. The psalm is the poetic echo of our lesson.

III. We have the momentary melting of Saul's heart. He breaks into passionate weeping. With that sudden flashing out into vehement emotion, so characteristic of him throughout, and, in these latter days of his life, so significant of enfeebled self-control, he recognises David's generous forbearance in its contrast to his own hate, which, for the moment, he feels to be causeless. There is a piteous remembrance of the days when David soothed him by song, in his mention of the sweet 'voice,' and some rekindling of ancient love in his calling him 'My son.' Then follow the sad words which confess the hopelessness of his struggle against the divine purpose, and his appeal for mercy to his house. The picture may well move solemn thoughts and pity for that scathed and solitary soul, seeing for a moment, as by a lightning flash, the madness of his course, and yet held so fast in the grip of his dark passions that he cannot shake off their tyranny.

Two great lessons are taught by that tragic figure of the weeping and yet unchanged king. One is of the power of forbearing gentleness to exorcise hate. The true way to 'overcome evil' is to melt it by fiery coals of gentleness. That is God's way. An iceberg may be crushed to powder, but every fragment is still ice. Only sunshine that melts it will turn it into sweet water. Love is conqueror, and the only conqueror, and its conquest is to transform hate into love.

The other lesson is the worthlessness of mere feeling, which by its very nature passes away, and, like un-stored rain, leaves the rock in its obstinate hardness more exposed. Saul only increased his guilt by reason of the fleeting glimpse of his folly which he did not follow up; and our gleams of insight into some sin and madness of ours but add to our responsibility. Emotion which does not lead to action hardens the heart, and adds to our guilt and condemnation.

LOVE AND REMORSE

'And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him. 6. Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee. 7. So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him. 8. Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. 9. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? 10. David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. 11. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. 12. So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster: and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them. . . . 21. Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. 22. And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23. The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered thee into my hand to-day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. 24. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation. 25. Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.'—1 SAMUEL XXVI. 5-12; 21-25.

It is fashionable at present to regard this incident and the other instance of David's sparing Saul, when in his power, as two versions of one event. But it is not

improbable that the hunted outlaw should twice have taken refuge in the same place, or that his hiding-place should have been twice betrayed. He had but a small choice of safe retreats, and the Ziphites had motive for a second betrayal in the fact of the first, and of its failure to secure David's capture. The whole cast of the two incidents is so different that it is impossible to see how the one could have been evolved from the other, and either they are both true, or they are both unhistorical, or, at best, are both the product of fancy working on, and arbitrarily filling up, a very meagre skeleton of fact. Many of the advocates of the identity of the incident at the bottom of the two accounts would accept the latter explanation; we take the former.

Saul had three thousand men with him; David had left his little troop 'in the wilderness,' and seems to have come with only his two companions, Ahimelech and his own nephew, Abishai, to reconnoitre. He sees, from some height, the camp, with the transport wagons making a kind of barricade in the centre—just as camps are still arranged in South Africa and elsewhere,—and Saul established therein as in a rude fortification. A bold thought flashes into his mind as he looks. Perhaps he remembered Gideon's daring visit to the camp of Midian. He will go down, and not only into the camp, but 'to Saul,' through the ranks and over the barrier. What to do he does not say, but the two fierce fighters beside him think of only one thing as sufficient motive for such an adventure. Abishai volunteers to go with him; no doubt Ahimelech would have been ready also, but two were enough, and three would only have increased risk. So they lay close hid till night fell, and then stole down through the sleeping ranks with silent movements, like a couple

of Indians on the war-trail, climbed the barricade, and stood at last where Saul lay, with his spear, as the emblem of kingship, stuck upright at his head, and a cruse of water for slaking thirst, if he awoke, beside him. Those who should have been his guards lay sleeping round him, for a 'deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them.' What a vivid, strange picture it is, and how characteristic of the careless discipline of unscientific Eastern warfare!

The tigerish lust for blood awoke in Abishai. Whatever sad, pitying, half-tender thoughts stirred in David as he looked at the mighty form of Saul, with limbs relaxed in slumber, and perhaps some of the gloom and evil passions charmed out of his face, his nephew's only thought was, 'What a fair mark! what an easy blow!' He was brutally eager to strike once, and truculently sure that his arm would make sure that once would be enough. He was religious too, after a strange fierce fashion. God—significantly he does not say 'Jehovah'; his religion was only the vague belief in a deity—had delivered Saul into David's hands, and it would be a kind of sin not to kill him. How many bloody tragedies that same unnatural alliance of religion and murderous hate has varnished over! Very beautifully does David's spirit contrast with this. Abishai represents the natural impulse of us all—to strike at our enemies when we can, to meet hate with hate, and do to another the evil that he would do to us.

David here, though he could be fierce and cruel enough sometimes, and had plenty of the devil in him, listens to his nobler self, which listens to God, and, at a time when everything tempted him to avenge himself, resists and overcomes. He is here a saint after the New Testament pattern. Abishai had, in effect,

said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' David's finely-tuned ear heard, long before they were spoken on earth, the great Christian words, 'I say unto you, Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.' He knew that Saul had been 'rejected,' but he was 'Jehovah's anointed,' and the unction which had rested on that sleeping head lingered still. It was not for David to be the executor of God's retribution. He left himself and his cause in Jehovah's hands, and no doubt it was with sorrow and pitying love, not altogether quenched by Saul's mad hate, that he foresaw that the life which he spared now was certain one day to be smitten. We may well learn the lesson of this story, and apply it to the small antagonisms and comparatively harmless enmities which may beset our more quiet lives. David in Saul's 'laager,' Stephen outside the wall, alike lead up our thoughts to Jesus' prayer, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

The carrying off of the spear and the cruse was a touch of almost humour, and it, with the ironical taunt flung across the valley to Abner, gives relief to the strain of emotion in the story. Saul's burst of passionate remorse is morbid, paroxysmal, like his fits of fury, and is sure to foam itself away. The man had no self-control. He had let wild, ungoverned moods master him, and was truly 'possessed.' One passion indulged had pushed him over the precipice into insanity, or something like it. Let us take care not to let any passion, emotion, or mood get the upper hand. 'That way madness lies.' 'He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, without walls.'

And let us not confound remorse with repentance.

'The sorrow of the world worketh death.' Saul grovelled in agony that day, but to-morrow he was raging again with more than the old frenzy of hate. Many a man says, 'I have played the fool,' and yet goes on playing it again when the paroxysm of remorse has stormed itself out. David's answer was by no means effusive, for he had learned how little Saul's regrets were to be trusted. He takes no notice of the honeyed words of invitation to return, and will not this time venture to take back the spear and cruse, as he had done, on the previous occasion, the skirt of Saul's robe. He solemnly appeals to Jehovah's righteous judgment to determine his and Saul's respective 'righteousness and faithfulness.' He is silent as to what that judgment may have in reserve for Saul, but for himself he is calmly conscious that, in the matter of sparing Saul's life, he has done right, and expects that God will deliver him 'out of all tribulation.' That is not self-righteous boasting, although it does not exactly smack of the Christian spirit; but it is faith clinging to the confidence that God is 'not unrighteous to forget' his servant's obedience, and that the innocent will not always be the oppressor's victim.

What a strange, bewildered, self-contradictory chaos of belief and intention is revealed in poor, miserable Saul's parting words! He blesses the man whom he is hunting to slay. He knows that all his wild efforts to destroy him are foredoomed to failure, and that David 'shall surely prevail'; and yet he cannot give up fighting against the inevitable,—that is, against God. How many of us are doing the very same thing—rushing on in a course of life which we know, when we are sane, to be dead against God's will, and therefore doomed to utter collapse some day!

SAUL

'And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me.'—1 SAMUEL xxviii. 15.

AMONG all the persons of Scripture who are represented as having fallen away from God and wrecked their lives, perhaps there is none so impressive as the giant form of the first king of Israel. Huge and black, seamed and scarred with lightning marks of passions, moody and suspicious, devil-ridden and lonely, doubting his truest friends, and even his son, striking blindly in his fury at the gracious, sunny poet-warrior who shows so bright, so full of resource, so nimble, so generous, by contrast with the heavy strength of the moody giant, and ever escapes the javelin that quivers harmlessly in the wall, with an inevitable destiny hanging over his head, and at last creeping to 'wizards that peep and mutter,' and dying a suicide, with his army in full flight and his son dead at his feet—what a course and what an end for the chosen of the Lord, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came with the anointing oil, and gave him a new heart for his kingly office.

I know not anywhere a sadder story: and I know not where human lips ever poured out a more awful wail—like a Titan in his rage of pain—than these words of our text. Bright hopes and fair promise, and much that was good and true in performance—all came to this. A few hours more and the 'battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers.' Madness, despair, defeat, death, all were the sequel of, 'Because thou hast rejected the commandment of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king.' A true

soul's tragedy! Let us look together at its course, and gather the lessons that lie on the surface. We have neither space nor wish here to enter upon the many points of minute interest and curiosity which are in the story. We have to be contented with large outlines.

Look then

I. At the bright dawn.

The early story gives us many traits of beauty in Saul's character. Not only physical strength but a winning personality are apparent. His modesty and humility when Samuel salutes him are made plain. And we are distinctly told that as he turned away from Samuel, 'God gave him another heart,' by which we are to understand not 'regeneration' but an inspiration, that equipped him for his office.

How many a man finds that sudden elevation ruins him! But often it evokes what is good, brings an entire change of disposition, as with 'Harry of Monmouth.' But it was not only his new responsibility which brought into action powers that had previously been dormant. New circumstances, no doubt, did something, but Saul's 'new' heart was God's gift.

The story of the beginning of his reign reveals a very noble and lovable character. We can but mention his modesty in hiding among the stuff, his disregard of the murmurs of those who would not do homage ('made as though he had been deaf'), his return, as it would seem, to his home-life and farm-work, his chivalrous boldness and warlike energy, which sprung at once to activity on the call of a great exigency in Jabesh-Gilead, his humane and sweet repression of the people's desire, in their first flush of pride in their soldier king, to slay his enemies, and his devout acknowledgment that not he but God has wrought this salvation.

So for the first year of his reign all went well.

How much of divine influence a man may have and yet fling it all away! How unreliable a thing mere natural goodness is! How much apparent goodness may coexist with deep-seated evil! How bright a beginning may darken into a tempestuous day! How seeds of evil may lurk in the fairest character! How little one can be judged by part of his life! How it is not the possession, but the retention, of goodness and devout impressions that makes a man good.

II. The gathering clouds.

The acts recorded as darkening the fair dawn of Saul's reign may seem too trivial to deserve the stern retribution that followed them, but small acts may be great sins. The first of them was his offering sacrifices without authority, an act which Samuel stigmatised as wanton, deliberate disobedience to 'the commandment of the Lord thy God.' Next came his rash and absurd laying of a curse on any soldier who should eat food before evening, and his consequent mad determination to kill Jonathan, for 'taking a little honey' on the end of his rod. Next came his flagrant disobedience to the divine command transmitted to him through Samuel, to 'smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not.' We shudder at such ferocious extermination, but we are to remember that Saul was moved by no pity, but by mere lust for loot, and tried to deceive God, in the person of His representative Samuel, by the lie that the people had coerced him, and that the motive for preserving the best of the cattle was to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel's blaze of indignation gave the world the great word: 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.'

Putting all these acts together, we have the sad

picture of a character steadily deteriorating. He is growing daily more self-willed and impatient of the restraint of God's commanding will. He is chafing at his position as a viceroy, not an absolute sovereign. He is becoming tyrannical, careless of his subjects' lives, intolerant of opposition, remonstrance, or advice. The tragedy of his decadence is summed up in Samuel's stern word: 'Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'

Trivial acts may show great and deep-seated evil. A small swelling under the arm-pit is the sign of the plague and the precursor of swift death.

The master-sin is disobedience, self-willed departure from God. That disobedience may be as virulently active in a trifle as in a deed that men call great. Self-will is the tap root of all sin, however labyrinthine the outgrowth from it.

Disobedience honeycombs a soul. The attractive early traits in Saul's character slowly perhaps but steadily, disappeared. The fair morning sky was heavy with thunder-clouds by midday, and they all began with a light fleecy film that none noticed at first.

III. The long eclipse.

'An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and the Spirit of God departed from him.'

Modern psychologists would call Saul's case an instance of insanity brought about by indulgence in passion and self-will. Is there any reason why the deeper, more religious explanation should not be united with the scientific one? Does not God work in the working of 'natural' phenomena?

What we nowadays call insanity is not very far off from a man who habitually indulges in passionate self-will, and spurns God from any authority over his life.

What were Saul's characteristics now? The story tells of bursts of ungovernable fury, of unslumbering and universal suspicions, of utter misery, seeing enemies everywhere and complaining, 'None of you hath pity upon me,' of ferocious cruelty and gloomy despair, of paroxysms of agonising but transient remorse.

It is an awful picture, and it grimly teaches lessons that we shall be wise to write deeply on our hearts.

What a ruin a man makes of himself!

How hideous a godless soul is!

What unhappiness is certain if we dismiss God from ruling our lives!

How useless remorse is unless it leads to repentance!

IV. The stormy sunset.

The scene at Endor makes one's flesh creep. No more tragic picture of failure and despair was ever painted. The greatest dramatists, whose creations move the terror and pity of the world, have imagined no more heart-touching figure.

It matters very little—nothing at all in fact—either for the dramatic force or for the religious impressiveness of the scene, whether the woman 'brought up' Samuel, or whether she was as much awed as Saul was, by the coming up of 'an old man' covered with the well-known 'mantle.' The boding prophecy of to-morrow's defeat and death filled yet fuller the cup that had seemed to be already full of all misery. And that collapse of strength in the huddled figure, prostrate in the witch's den, may well stand for a prophecy of what will be the upshot at the last of a self-will that boasts of its own power, and tries to shake off dependence on God.

WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?

'Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here?'—
1 SAMUEL xxix. 3.

'The word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?'—1 KINGS xix. 9.

I HAVE put these two verses together, not only because of their identity in form, though that is striking, but because they bear upon one and the same subject, as will appear, if, in a word or two, I set each of them in its setting. David was almost at the lowest point of his fortunes when he fled into foreign territory, and for awhile took service under one of the kings of the Philistines. He served him faithfully, and so, when the last great fight, in which Saul lost his life, was about to be waged between Philistia and Israel, David and his men came as a contingent to the army of the former. The Philistine commanders, very naturally, were suspicious of these allies, just as Englishmen would have been if, on the night before Waterloo, a brigade of Frenchmen had deserted and offered their help to fight Napoleon. So the question 'What do these Hebrews here?'—amongst our ranks—was an extremely natural one, and it was answered in the only possible way, by the subsequent departure of David and his men from the unnatural and ill-omened alliance.

Now, that suggests to us that Christian people are out of their places, even in the eyes of worldly people, when they are fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in certain causes; and it suggests the propriety of keeping apart. 'Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.' 'What do these Hebrews here?' is a question that Philistia often asks.

But now turn to the other question. Elijah had fallen into the mood of depression which so often follows great nervous tension. He had just offered the sacrifice on Carmel, and brought all Israel back to the Lord, and Jezebel had flamed out and threatened his life. The usually undaunted prophet, in the reaction after his great effort, was fearful for his life and deserted his work, flung himself into solitude and shook the dust off his feet against Israel. Was that not just doing what I have been saying that Christian people ought to do—separating himself from the world? In a sense, yes, but the voice came, ‘What dost thou here, Elijah?’ ‘Go back to your work; to Ahab, to Jezebel. Go back to death if need be. Do not shirk your duty on the pretence of separating yourself from the world.’

So we put the two questions together. They limit one another, and they suggest the *via media*, the course between, and lead me to say one or two plain things about that duty of Christian separation from an evil world.

I. The first thing that I would suggest to you is the inevitable intermingling, which is the law of God, and therefore can never be broken with impunity.

Christ’s parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in the world being like a man that sowed good seed in his field, which sprung up intermingled with tares, contains the lesson, not so much of the purity or non-purity of the Church as of the inseparable intertwining in the world of Christian people with others. The roots are matted together, and you cannot pull up a tare without danger of pulling up a wheat-stalk that has got interlaced with it. That is but to say that Society at present, and the earthly form of the King-

dom of God, are not organised on the basis of religious affinity, but upon a great many other things, such as family, kindred, business, a thousand ties of all sorts which mat men together, and make it undesirable, impossible, contrary to God's intention, that the good people should club themselves together, and leave the bad ones to rot and stink. The two are meant to be in close contact. 'Let both grow together till the harvest.' If any Christian man were to do as the monks of old did, fly into solitude to look after his own soul, then the question which came to Elijah would be suitable to him, 'What doest thou here?' Is there not work enough for you out there, in that wicked world? Is that not the place for you? Where is the place for the 'salt'? Where the meat is in danger of putrefaction. Rub it in! That is what it was meant for. 'Ye are the light of the world.' That suggests the picture of a lamp upon a pedestal that it may send out its rays, but itself remains apart. But the companion metaphor suggests the closest possible contact, and such contact is duty for us Christian people. Elijah ran away from his work. There are types of Christian life to-day unwholesomely self-engrossed, and too much occupied with their own spiritual condition, to realise and discharge the duty of witnessing in the world. Wherever you find a Christian man—whether he is a monk with bare foot, and a rope round his brown robe, and shaven head, or whether he is in the garb of modern Protestantism—that tries more to keep himself apart, in the enjoyment and cultivation of his own religious life, than to fling himself into the midst of the world's worst evil, in order to fight and to cure it, you get a man who is sharing in Elijah's transgression, and needs Elijah's rebuke. The intermingling is

inevitable in the present state of things; and family, kindred, business, social and political movements, all require that Christian people should work side by side with men who are not possessors of 'like precious faith.' If ever there have been individuals or communities that have tried to traverse that law, they have developed narrowness and bitterness and stunted growth, and a hundred evils that we all know.

II. And now let me say a word about the second thing, and that is—the imperative separation.

'What do these Israelites here?' is the question. Much of all our lives lies outside these necessary connections with the world, of which I have been speaking. And the question for each of us is, What do we do when we are left to do as we like? Where do we go? When the iron weight fastened by the bit of string is taken off the sapling, it starts back to its original uprightness. Is that what your Christianity does for you? When you are left to yourself, when you have done all the work that is required, and you are free, where do you turn naturally? It is of no use to lay down special regulations. There has been far too much regulation and red-tape in our Christianity all along. Do not let us put so much stress upon individual acts. Let us look at the spirit. Whither do I turn? What do I like to do? Who are my chosen companions? What are my recreations? Is my life of such a sort as that the world will point to me, and say, 'What! you here! a professing Christian; what are you doing here?'

I remember that in the autobiography of Mr. Spurgeon, there is a story told about what he did when a child, and living with his grandfather, the pastor of a little country church. There was a very prominent member of that church who was in the habit of going

into the public-house occasionally; and the small boy stepped into the sanded parlour where this inconsistent man was sitting, walked up to him, and said, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' It was the turning-point of the man's life. That is the question that I desire us all to ask ourselves—where do we go, and what sort of lives do we live in the moments when our own voluntary choice determines our action?

'A man is known by the company he keeps,' says an old Latin proverb, and I am bound to say that I do not think that it is a good sign of the depth of a Christian professor's religion if he feels himself more at home in the company of people who do not share his religion than in the company of those that do. I do not wish to be strait-laced and narrow, but I do not wish, either, to be so broad as to obliterate altogether the distinction between Christian people and others. The fact of the case is this, dear friends; if we are Christ's servants we have more in common with the most uncongenial Christians than we have with the most congenial man who is not a Christian. And if we were nearer our Master we should feel that it was so. 'Being let go they went to their own company.' Where do you go when you can make your choice?

I am not going to speak in detail about occupations or recreations. I can quite believe that the theatre might be made an instrument of morality. I can quite believe that a race-course might be a perfectly innocent place. I can quite believe that there may be no harm in a dance. All that I say is that there are two questions which every Christian professor ought to ask himself about such subjects. One is, Can I ask God to bless this thing, and my doing it? And the other is, Does this help or hinder my religion? If we will take

these two questions with us as tests of conduct and companionship, I do not think that we shall go far wrong, either in the choice of our companions, or in the choice of our surroundings of any kind, or in the choice of our recreations and our occupations. But if we do not, then I am quite sure that we shall go wrong in them all. 'What communion hath light with darkness?' 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.'

The main question is, do I grasp the aim of life with clearness and decision as being to make myself by God's help such a character as God has pleasure in? If I do I shall regulate all these things thereby.

III. Now there is one last suggestion that I wish to make, and that is the double questioning that we shall have to stand.

The lords of the Philistines said, 'What do these Hebrews here?' They saw the inconsistency, if David and his men did not. They were sharp to detect it, and David and his band did not rise in their opinion, but decidedly went down, when they saw them marching there, in such an unnatural place as 'behind Achish,' and ready to flesh their swords in the blood of their brethren. So let me tell you, you will neither recommend your religion nor yourselves to men of the world, by inconsistently trying to identify yourselves with them. There are a great many professing Christians nowadays whose mouths are full of the word 'liberality,' and who seem to try to show how absolutely identical with a godless man's a God-fearing one's life may be made. Do you think that the world respects that type of Christian, or regards his religion as the kind of thing to be admired? No; the question that

they fling at such people is the question which David was humiliated by having pitched at his head—‘What do these Hebrews here?’ ‘Let them go back to their mountains. This is no place for *them*.’ The world respects an out-and-out Christian; but neither God nor the world respects an inconsistent one.

But there is another question, and another Questioner—‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’ God did not ask Elijah the question because he did not know the answer; but because he wished to make Elijah put his mood into words, since then Elijah would understand it a little better, and, when he found the tremendous difficulty of making a decent excuse, would begin to suspect that the conduct that wanted so much glozing was not exactly the conduct fit for a prophet. And so let us think that God is looking down upon us, in all our occupation of our free time, and that He is wishing us to put into words what we are about, and why we are where we are.

What do you think you would say if, in some of these moments of unnecessary intermingling with questionable things and doubtful people, you were brought suddenly to this, that you had to formulate into some kind of plausibility your reason for being there? I am afraid it would be a very lame and ragged set of reasons that many of us would have to give. Well! better that we should now have to answer the question ‘What doest thou here?’ than that we should have to fail in answering the future question, after we have done with the world: ‘What didst thou there?’

Dear brethren, let us cleave to Christ, and that will separate us from the world. If we cleave to the world, that will separate us from Christ. I do not

insist on details of conduct, but I do beseech you, professing Christians, to recognise that you are set in the world in order to grow like your Master, and that their tendency to help you to that likeness is the one test of all occupations, recreations, and companionships, by which we may know whether we are in or out of the place that pleases Him. And if we are in it, that blessed hope which is held forth in the parable to which I have already referred, will come full of sweetness and of strength to us, that, yonder, men will be grouped according to their moral and religious character; that the tares will be taken away from the wheat, and, that as Christ says, 'Then shall the righteous flame as the sun in their heavenly Father's Kingdom.'

THE SECRET OF COURAGE

'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'—1 SAMUEL xxx. 6.

DAVID was at perhaps the very lowest ebb of his fortunes. He had long been a wandering outlaw, and had finally been driven, by Saul's persistent hostility, to take refuge in the Philistines' country. He had gathered around himself a band of desperate men, and was living very much like a freebooter. He had found refuge in a little city of the Philistines, far down in the South, from which he and his men had marched as a contingent in the Philistine army, which was preparing an attack upon Saul. But, naturally, the Philistine soldiers doubted their ally, and he was obliged to take himself and his troops back again to their temporary home.

When he came there it was a heap of smoking ruins.

Everything was gone; property, cattle, wives, children—and all was desolation. His turbulent followers rose against him, a mutiny broke out—a dangerous thing amongst such a crew—and they were ready to stone him. And at that moment what did he do? Nothing. Was he cast down? No. Was he agitated? No. ‘But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.’

Now the first thing I notice is

I. The grand assurance which this man gripped fast at such a time.

It is not by accident, nor is it a mere piece of tautology, that we read ‘the Lord *his* God.’ For, if you will remember, the very keynote of the psalms which are ascribed to David is just that expression, ‘My God,’ ‘My God.’ So far as the very fragmentary records of Jewish literature go, it would appear as if David was the very first of all the ancient singers to grapple that thought that he stood in a personal, individual relation to God, and God to him. And so it was *his* God that he laid hold of at that dark hour.

Now I am not putting too much into a little word when I insist upon it that the very essence and nerve of what strengthened David, at that supreme moment of desolation, was the conviction that welled up in his heart that, in spite of it all, he had a grip of God’s hand as his very own, and God had hold of him. Just think of the difference between the attitude of mind and heart expressed in the names that were more familiar to the Israelitish people, and this name for Jehovah. ‘The God of Israel’—that is wide, general; and a man might use it and yet fail to feel that it implied that each individual of the community stood by himself in a personal relation to God. But David penetrated through the broad, general thought, and

got into the heart of the matter. It was not enough for him, in his time of need, to stay himself upon a vague universal goodness, but he had to clasp to his burdened heart the individualising thought, 'the God of Israel is *my* God.'

Think, too, of the contrast of the thoughts and emotions suggested by 'My God,' and by 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' Great as that name is, it carries the mind away back into the past, and speaks of a historical relation in former days, which may or may not continue in all its tenderness and sweetness and power into the prosaic present. But when a man feels, not only 'the God of Jacob is our Refuge,' but, 'the God of Jacob is my God,' then the whole thing flashes up into new power. 'My sun'—will one man claim property in that great luminary that pours its light down on the whole world? Yes.

'The sun whose beams most glorious are,
Disdaineth no beholder,'

as the old song has it. Each man's eye receives the straight impact of its universal beams. It is my sun, though it be the light that lightens all men that come into the world. 'My atmosphere'—will one man claim the free, unappropriated winds of heaven as his? Yes, for they will pour into his lungs; and yet his brother will be none the poorer.

I would not go the length of saying that the living realisation, in heart and mind, of this personal possession of God is the difference between a traditional and vague profession of religion and a vital possession of religion, but if it is not the difference, it goes a long way towards explaining the difference. The man who contents himself with the generality of a Gospel

for the world, and who can say no more than that Jesus Christ died for all, has yet to learn the most intimate sweetness, and the most quickening and transforming power, of that Gospel, and he only learns it when he says, 'Who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.'

So do not let us be content with saying, 'the God of Israel,' and its many thousands, or 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob,' who filled the past with His lustre, but let us bring the general good into our own houses, as men might draw the waters of Niagara into their homes through pipes, and let us cry: 'My Lord and my God!' 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

II. Now note, secondly, the sufficiency of this one conviction and assurance.

Here is one of the many eloquent 'buts' of the Bible. On the one hand is piled up a black heap of calamities, loss, treachery and peril; and opposed to them is only that one clause: 'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' There was only one possession in all the world, except his body and the clothes that he stood in, that he could call his own at that moment. Everything else was gone; his property was carried off by raiders, his home was smouldering embers. But the Amalekites had not stolen God from him. Though he could no longer say, 'My house, my city, my possessions,' he could say, 'My God.' Whatever else we lose, as long as we have Him we are rich; and whatever else we possess, we are poor as long as we have not Him. God is enough; whatever else may go. The Lord his God was the sufficient portion for this man when he stood a homeless pauper. He had lost everything that his heart clung to; wives, children; Abigail

and Abinoam were captives in the arms of some Amalekites; his house was left to him desolate; his heart was bleeding. 'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God,' and the bleeding heart was stanch'd, and the yearning for some one to love and be loved by was satisfied, when he turned himself from the desolation of earth to the riches in the heavens. He was standing on the edge of possible death, for his followers were ready to stone him. He had come through many perils in the past, but he had never been nearer a fatal end than he was at that moment. But the thought of the undying Friend lifted him buoyantly above the dread of death, and he could look with an unwinking eye right into the fleshless eye-sockets of the skeleton, and say, 'I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'

So for poverty, loss, the blasting of earthly hopes, the crushing of earthly affections, the extremity of danger, and the utmost threatening of death, here is the sufficient remedy—that one mighty assurance: 'The Lord is my God.' For if He is 'the strength of my heart,' He will be 'my portion for ever.' He is not poor who has God for his, nor does he wander with a hungry heart who can rest his heart on God's; nor need he fear death who possesses God, and in Him eternal life.

So, brethren, in all our changing circumstances, there is more than enough for us in that sweet, simple, strong thought. The end of sorrow (that is to say, the purpose thereof) is to breed in us the conviction that God is ours, to drive us to Him by lack of all beside; and the end of sorrow (that is to say, the termination thereof) is the kindling in our hearts of the light of that blessed assurance, for with Him we shall fear no evil. You never know the good of the breakwater

until the storm is rolling the waves against its outer side. Light a little candle in a room, and you will not see the lightning when it flashes outside, however stormy the sky, and seamed with the fiery darts. If we have God in our hearts, we have enough for courage and for strength.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how this darkest moment of David's fortunes was the moment at which the darkness broke. Three days after this *émeute* of his turbulent followers, there came a fugitive into the camp with news that Saul was dead and David was king. So it was not in vain that he had 'strengthened himself in the Lord his God.' Our 'light affliction which is but for a moment' leads on to a manifestation of the true power of God our Friend, and to the breaking of the day.

III. And now the last thing to be noted is the effort by which this assurance is attained and sustained.

The words of the original convey even more forcibly than those of our translation the thought of David's own action in securing him the hold of God as his. He 'strengthened *himself* in the Lord his God.' The Hebrew conveys the notion of effort, persistent and continuous; and it tells us this, that when things are as black as they were round David at that hour—it is not a matter of course, even for a good man, that there shall well up in his heart this tranquillising and victorious conviction; but he has to set himself to reach and to keep it. God will give it, but He will not give it unless the man strains after it. David 'strengthened himself in the Lord,' and if he had not doggedly set about resisting the pressure of circumstances, and flinging himself as it were, by an effort, into the arms of God, circumstances would have been too strong for

him, and despair would have shrouded his soul. In the darkest moment it is possible for a man to surround himself with God's light, but even in the brightest it is not possible to do so unless he makes a serious effort.

That effort must consist mainly in two things. One is that we shall honestly try to occupy our minds, as well as our hearts, with the truth which certifies to us that God is, in very deed, ours. If we never think, or think languidly and rarely, about what God has revealed to us, by the word and life and death and intercession of Jesus Christ, concerning Himself, His heart of love towards us, and His relations to us, then we shall not have, either in the time of disaster or of joy, the blessed sense that He is indeed ours. If a man will not think about Christian truth he will not have the blessedness of Christian possession of God. There is no mystery about the road to the sweetness and holiness and power that may belong to a Christian. The only way to win them is to be occupied, far more than most of us are, with the plain truths of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. If you never think about them they cannot affect you, and they will not make you sure that God is yours.

But we cannot occupy ourselves with these truths unless we have a distinct and resolute purpose running through our lives, of averting our eyes from the things that might make us lose sight of them and of Him. David had his choice. He could either, as a great many of us do, stand there and look, and look, and look, and see nothing but his disasters, or he could look past them; and see beyond them God. Peter had his choice whether he would look at the water, or whether he would look at Jesus Christ. He chose to look at the water; 'and when

he saw the wind boisterous he began to sink'—of course, and when he looked at Christ and cried: 'Lord, save me!' he was held up—equally of course. Make the effort not to let the sorrowful things, or the difficult things, or the fearful things, or the joyous things, in your life, absorb you, but turn away, and, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in another connection, 'look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith.' David had to put constraint upon himself, to admit any other thoughts into his mind than those that were pressed into it by the facts before his eyes; but he put on the constraint, and so he was encouraged because he encouraged himself.

There is another thing which we have to make an effort to do, if we would have the blessedness of this conviction filling and flooding our hearts. For the possession is reciprocal; we say, 'My God,' and He says, 'My people.' Unless we yield ourselves to Him and say, 'I am Thine,' we shall never be able to say, 'Thou art mine.' We must recognise His possession of us; we must yield ourselves; we must obey; we must elect Him as our chief good, we must feel that we are not our own, but bought with a price. And then when we look up into the heavens thus submissive, thus obedient, thus owning His authority and His rights, as well as claiming His love and His tenderness, and cry: 'My Father,' He will bend down and whisper into our hearts: 'Thou art My beloved son.' Then we shall be 'strong, and of a good courage,' however weak and timid, and we shall be rich, though, like David, we have lost all things.

AT THE FRONT OR THE BASE

'As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that carrieth by the stuff.'—1 SAMUEL xxx. 24.

DAVID'S city of Ziklag had been captured by the Amalekites, while he and all his men who could carry arms were absent, serving in the army of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. On their return they found ruin, their homes harried, their wives, children, and property carried off. Wearied already with their long march, they set off at once in pursuit of the spoilers, who had had a long start of them. When they reached the brook Besor, two hundred of them were too weary and footsore to ford it, and so had to be left behind. But these were not useless, for the heavy baggage was left in their charge, and the other four hundred were thus enabled to march more lightly, and therefore more swiftly. They picked up a sick slave, whom his Amalekite master had heartlessly abandoned to die on the 'veldt.' He was almost dead, so they fed him, and when he was able to answer, questioned him. He undertook to guide David and his band, and thus, as twilight was beginning to fall and the Amalekites were 'spread abroad over all the ground, eating and drinking and feasting because of all the great spoil that they had taken,' the four hundred burst on them, routed them utterly, and won back all their goods and much more.

Then came a quarrel. The four hundred who had gone to the fight insisted that the booty was theirs, and that the two hundred who had had no hand in winning it should have no share in the distribution. But David over-ruled this and laid down a principle of

distribution which was adopted as the standing law of Israel—that the soldiers who were actually in the fight and those who stayed behind guarding the baggage, looking after ‘the base of operations,’ should share alike. It was fair that they should do so, for the two hundred would willingly have been in the thick of battle, and, further, though they did not fight, they helped the fighters, and by guarding the heavy baggage contributed to the victory as really as if they had been in the fray and come out of it with swords dripping with Amalekite blood.

I. God’s battle requires two forms of service.

In David’s raid, as in every campaign, some of the available strength has to be taken to guard the camp, the place where the supplies are, the base of operations, and pickets and detachments have to be left behind all the way, to keep open the communication. The sword is not more needful than the long train of baggage carts, and the forwarding of supplies to the front is as indispensable to the conduct of the war as the headlong charge.

In every great work there is the same distinction of parts and functions, all co-operating to produce the effect which seems to be entirely due to that cause which happens to come last in the series. Organisation of labour associates many hands in the different stages of the one result. There are very few things in this world which are the product of one simple cause alone. You cannot grow a grain of corn without the seed with its vital germ, the soil with its mysterious influences, the sunshine and the rain, the sower’s hand and basket, the plougher’s plough, and all these, except the blessed sunshine, are the results of a series of other causes which lie forgotten, but are really represented

in the issue. If one of them were struck out, all the rest would be ineffectual. In a great machine all its parts are equally necessary, and a defect in a cog on a wheel would be as fatal as a flaw in the cylinder or a crack in the mighty shaft. What would become of a ship if the pintle that the rudder works on were away? The effect of a whole orchestra may depend on the coming in of the flute at the right place.

So in the work which God has given to the Church to do, there are the two forms of service, the direct and the indirect. There are the fighters and the guards of the baggage. And these two are equally necessary. That without which a great work could not have been done is great. When Luther came out from the Diet of Worms, and a knight clapped him on the shoulder, and said, 'Well done! little monk,' he had a share in the memorable deed of that day. The man who gave Luther a flagon of beer when his lips were dry with speaking there before emperor and cardinals, was included in the promise to the giver 'of a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple.'

We have brethren in Christ who have gone to the front, hazarding their lives on the high places of the field. Their hands will droop if they do not feel that a chain of sympathy stretches between them and us, for they in their solitude need all the strength which the confidence of a multitude at home feeling with them can give. They are powerfully influenced by the tone of feeling among us. When devotion languishes and faith droops here, these will generally pass through the same phases among them. When we are strong and bold, their hearts will be quickened by the pulsations of ours, and their courage heightened by thoughts of those from whom they come. Our disorders, our

heresies, our struggles are all reproduced on the mission field. An epidemic here travels thither before long, and the spiritual condition of the Church at home is one of the most powerful means of determining that of the churches abroad. A blight among our vines soon shows itself in the little gardens just reclaimed from the waste.

The fighters need material helps and appliances for their work. The days in which the law for apostles and missionaries was, 'Go forth without purse or scrip,' ended before Jesus said, 'Go ye into all the world.' That condition was solemnly revoked by our Lord Himself, when He said, 'When I sent you forth without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip.' The fighters' material wants are now to be met by Christ's administration of natural means, even as before they had been met by Christ's administration of supernatural ones. His messengers cannot live, do their work, or extend the kingdom, but by the help of material appliances. Those who 'abide by the stuff' are to organise the commissariat department, and to see that those who are far ahead, among the ranks of the foe, do not want for either food or weapons, and are not left isolated, hemmed in by the enemy, and languishing because they feel that they are forgotten by those who 'live at home at ease.'

There has always been that division of labour. Our Lord Himself 'had need of' many humble instruments as helpers. There were the woman who ministered to His wants, the faithful few whose presence and sympathy were joyful to Him even on the Mount of Transfiguration, and longed for even in the awful solitude of the agony in Gethsemane, the sisters of Bethany whose

humble home was His last shelter before the Cross, the owner of the Upper Room, the sad women who prepared sweet spices, the ruler who consecrated his new sepulchre in a garden by His body. Even He, treading the wine-press alone, needed helpers in the background, and, while conquering for us in the awful duel with our enemy, had humble friends who 'tarried by the stuff.' Similarly Paul had his helpers, on whose names he lovingly lingers and has made immortal, a 'Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church,' an 'Epaphroditus, my fellow soldier, who ministered to my wants,' and therefore was a soldier, though he did not fight, an 'Onesiphorus, who oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.'

But let us remember that these two forms of service which are equally necessary are equally binding on us all, in the measure of our opportunity and capacity. Our performing the indirect is no excuse for our neglecting the direct. The conversion of the world is *our* business and not to be handed over to any society or missionary. No Christian can be only and always a non-combatant, without sin and loss. He is bound to take some share in the actual conflict in one or other of its many parts.

II. Service may be different in kind and one in essence.

The determining element in our actions is their motive. Not what we work in, but what we work for, gives the principle of classification. Not the spots on the skin or the colour of the feathers, but the bony skeleton, is the basis of zoological classification. It is not the size or binding of a book, be it quarto or folio or octavo, be it in leather or cloth or paper covers, but its subject, that settles its place in a catalogue. The

Christian motives of love to Christ, self-sacrifice, devotion, love to men, make all deeds the same which have these in them in like strength. It matters not whether the copy of a great picture be in oils or an engraving or a photograph, so long as it *is* a copy. The smallest piece of indirect Christian service may be thus elevated to the same plane as the greatest.

'Mere money-giving' may have in it all these qualities, as truly and in as great a degree, as the deeds of Apostles and martyrs. Remember how Peter puts in one category these two forms of service, as equally flowing from 'the manifold grace of God,' and equally to be exercised as 'good stewards' thereof—'If any man speaketh, speaking as it were the oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.' Remember how Paul classes all varieties of service as equally 'gifts according to the grace given to us,' and to be exercised in the same spirit whatever are the difference in their forms: 'or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality . . . he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.'

Let us learn, then, how we ought to help Christian fighters for Christ—as associating ourselves with them and their work by sympathy and sharing in their spirit and motives.

Let us learn how loftily we ought to think of the possible sacredness of the most secular forms of help, and to try thus to consecrate our indirect service.

III. All work done from the same motive will receive the same reward.

None need be startled by the thought that Christian work is rewarded. Essentially, it is not deeds but character that is rewarded. The 'reward' is the

possession of God of which such a character is capable, and the consequent blessedness which fills such a soul, and cannot but fill it, and which can be enjoyed by no other. The faithful servant enters into the joy of the Lord; the faithful administrator of his Lord's talents enters on the rule over cities in number the same as the talents. Capacity for service is the result of stewardship rightly administered here, and new opportunities yonder are sure to be provided for new capacities.

God's judgment takes little note of that which men's judgment all but exclusively notes. The conspicuousness or success of a man's deeds is nothing to Him. Differences of power are of no account. It is *faithfulness* that is required in a steward, and it is all the same whether the stewardship is of millions or of farthings. The saints nearest the glory in heaven will not always be the men whose words or deeds fill the pages of Church history and resound through the ages. There will be astounding new principles of nearness and comparative remoteness then.

Christ was repeating what David made a law in Israel, when He said: 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' Therein He recognises the identity in spiritual stature and motive for service, of the prophet and of his dumb helper, and assures us that those who, in widely different ways but under the guidance of the same spirit and motives, have contributed their respective shares to the one triumphant result shall be associated and equalised in the immortal reward.

So remember that what is necessary in our indirect work, if it is to be thus honoured, is that it should have our devotion, and our love to Jesus and to men, throbbing in it, and that it should be accompanied by direct

work, in so far as we have opportunities for that. Money-giving may be made sacred, and by it, exercised in the right spirit, we may 'lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation' and may 'lay hold upon eternal life.'

THE END OF SELF-WILL

'Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons. 3. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. 4. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. 5. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. 6. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together. 7. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. 8. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. 10. And they put his armour in the house of Ash-taroath; and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 11. And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12. All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 13. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.'—1 SAMUEL xxxi. 1-13.

THE story of Saul's tragic last days is broken in two by the account, in chapters xxix. and xxx., of David's fortunate dismissal from the invading army, and his exploits against Amalek. The contrast between the two lives, so closely intertwined and powerful for good and evil on each other, reaches its climax at the end of Saul's. While the one sets in dark thunderclouds, the other is bright with victory. While the fall of Saul lays all northern Israel bleeding at the feet of the enemy, David is sending the spoils of his conquest to the elders of Judah. Saul's headless and dishonoured

body hangs rotting in the sun on the walls of Bethshan, while David sits a conqueror in Ziklag. The introduction of the brightness of the two preceding chapters is intended to heighten the darkness that broods over this one, and to deepen the stern teaching of that terrible death. Defeat, desolation, despair, attend to his self-dug grave the unhappy king, whose end teaches us all what comes of self-willed resistance to the law and the Spirit of God. Everything else is subordinated in the narrative to the account of his death. Next to nothing is said about the battle, the very site of which is left obscure. We cannot tell whether it was fought down in the plain by the fountain at Jezreel, where Israel was encamped, according to 1 Samuel xxix. 1, or whether both sides manœuvred and changed their ground, and the decisive struggle was on the slope of Gilboa. In any case, the site was almost identical with that of Gideon's victory, but there was no Gideon in command on that dark day. The language of verse 1 seems to imply that the battle was over and the rout begun before the Israelites reached Gilboa. If so, we have to conceive of a short, hopeless struggle on the plain, and then a rush to the hills for safety, in which Saul and his sons and bodyguard were borne along, but held together, closely followed by the 'red pursuing spear' of the conquerors, fierce with ancestral hate and the memories of defeat. There, on the hillside, stands the towering form of Saul with a little ring of his children and retainers round him, the words he had heard last night in the sorceress' tent unnerving his arm, and many a past crime rising before him, and whispering in his ear,

'In the battle think on me,
And fall thy edgeless sword ; despair and die.'

There seems to have been a close encounter with some of the pursuers, and a hand-to-hand fight, in which Jonathan and his two brothers fell, and the rest of the bodyguard were slain or scattered. The prophecy of that mantle-swathed shape last night was in part fulfilled—'To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.' They lay stark at his feet, and he knew that he would soon join them. The last heart that loved him had ceased to beat in Jonathan's noble breast, and his own crimes had slain his sons. Who can paint the storm of contending passions in that lonely black soul? or were they all frozen into the numbness of despair?

But whatever else was in his soul, repentance was not there. He may have been seared by remorse, but he was not softened by penitence, and was fierce and proud in despair as he had been in prosperity. The Revised Version substitutes 'overtook' for 'hit' in verse 3; but Saul's fear 'lest these uncircumcised come' is against that rendering, and the fact that the enemy did not know of his death till next day (v. 8) is a difficulty in the way of accepting it. The word is literally 'found,' and possibly means that the archers recognised him, and were making for him, though, as would appear, from some cause they missed him in the confusion. The other change in the Revised Version, that of 'greatly distressed' for 'sore wounded,' fits the context; and if it be adopted, we have the picture of the unwounded but desperate man, once brave, but now stricken with a panic which opens his lips for his only word. In grim silence he had met the loss of battle, sons, and kingdom; but the proud sense of personal dignity is strong to the end, and he fiercely issues his last command, and embraces death to escape insult. The haughty spirit was unchanged, crushed

but the same, unsoftened, and therefore roused to madder defiance of God and man. What an awful last saying for 'the anointed of Jehovah,' and how the overweening self-will and vehemence and passionate pride of his whole life are gathered up in it!

His last command is disobeyed by the trembling armour-bearer, whose very awe makes him disobedient. Did Saul, at that last moment, send a thought to an armour-bearer whom he had had in happier days, and who was to inherit his lost kingdom? The enemy are coming nearer. No time is to be lost if he would escape the savage mutilations and torments which ancient warfare made the portion of captive kings. Not another word passes his lips, but, in the same grim silence, he fixes his sword upright in the ground, and flings himself on its point, and dies. All through his reign no hand had injured him but his own; and, as he lived, so he died, his own undoer and his own murderer. Suicide, the refuge of defeated monarchs and praised by heathen moralists as heroic, was rare in Israel. Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas are the instances of it. The most rudimentary recognition of the truths taught by the Old Testament would prevent it. If Saul had had any faith in God, any submission, any repentance, he could not have finished a life of rebellion by a self-inflicted death, which was itself the very desperation of rebellion. We have not to pronounce on his fate, but his act was a sin of the darkest dye.

Yet note how the narrative abstains from all comment. It neither condemns nor pities, though a profound sense of the tragic eclipse is audible in that summing up in verse 6: 'So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men (that is,

immediate followers or escort), that same day together.' And there they all lay, bloody corpses in the fellowship of death, on the slopes of Gilboa. Where Scripture is silent, it is not our part to speak; but we can scarcely turn from that mighty form, prone by his own rash act, without seeking to learn the lesson of his life and fate. Saul had many noble and lovable qualities, such as bravery, promptitude, in his earlier days modesty and generosity. All these he had by nature, but there is no sign that he ever sought to cultivate his moral character, or to win any grace that did not come naturally to him; nor is there any reason to suppose that religion had ever any strong hold on him. His whole character may be summed up in Samuel's words in announcing his rejection: 'Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry.' Rebellion persisted in, in spite of all remonstrances and checks, till it becomes master of the whole man, is the keynote of his later years. Before that baleful influence, as before some hot poison wind, all the flowers of good dispositions were burned up, and the bad stimulated to growth. His early virtues disappeared, and passed into their opposites. Modesty became arrogance, and a long course of indulgence in self-will developed cruelty, gloomy suspicion, and passionate anger, and left him the victim and slave of his own causeless hate. He who rebels against God mars his own character. The miserable later years of Saul, haunted and hunted as by a demon by his own indulged and swollen rebellion and unsleeping suspicion, are an example of the sorrows that ever dog sin; and, as he lies there on Gilboa, the terrible saying recurs to our memory: 'He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with three points, bearing on the solemn tragedy just recorded. First, we have the disastrous effects of it in the complete loss of the northern territories. 'The men . . . that were on the other side of the valley' are the tribes to the north of the great plain; and 'they that were on the other side Jordan' are probably those on the east bank. So thorough was the defeat, especially as Saul and the royal house were slain, that they abandoned their homes, and the Philistines took possession. 'One sinner destroyeth much good.' When Israel's king was madly rebellious, Israel was smitten, and its inheritance diminished.

Next we have the insults to the headless corpses. The Philistines did not know till the following day how complete was their victory. The account in 1 Chronicles x. adds that Saul's head was sent to the temple of Dagon, probably as a kind of effacing of the shame wrought there by the presence of the ark. The false gods had triumphed, as their worshippers thought, and Saul's death was Jehovah's defeat. That apparent victory of the idols and the mocking exultation over the bloody trophy and dented armour are, to the historian, not the least bitter consequences of the battle.

The last point is the brave midnight march of the men of Jabesh from their home on the eastern uplands beyond Jordan, across the river and up to Bethshan, perched on its lofty cliff, and overlooking the valley of the Jordan. It was a requital of Saul's deed in his early bright days, when, with his hastily raised levies, he scattered the Ammonites. It is one gleam of light amid the stormy sunset. There were men ready to hazard their lives even then, because of the noblest of

Saul's acts, which no tyrannical arbitrariness or fierceness of later days had blotted out. So the little band of grateful heroes carried back their ghastly load to Jabesh, and burned the mutilated bodies there, employing an unfamiliar mode, as we may suppose, by reason of their mutilation and decomposition, and then reverently gathering the white bones from the pyre, and laying them below the well-known tamarisk. Saul's one good deed as king sowed seeds of gratitude which flourished again, when the opportunity came. His many evil ones sowed evil seed which bore fatal fruit; and both were seen in his end.

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Expositions of Holy Scripture

By the Rev. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D., Litt.D., Manchester.

Complete in about 30 volumes. Handsomely bound in cloth, 8vo,
7s. 6d. each volume. To be published also by subscription,
six volumes in a series, price 24s. net per series.

First Series, Six Volumes, comprising:—

THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

THE PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH.

THE BOOKS OF ISAIAH (CHAPTERS XLIX–LXVI) AND
JEREMIAH.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW (*Three Volumes*).

Second Series, comprising:—

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK (*Two Volumes*).

THE BOOKS OF EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS,
AND DEUTERONOMY (*One Volume*).

THE BOOKS OF JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, SAMUEL,
AND KINGS (*Two Volumes*).

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, VOL. I.

BIBLE CLASS EXPOSITIONS

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d. each volume.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW
(*Two Volumes*).

THE GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE.
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON

IN THE 'EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE,' FIRST SERIES

Crown 8vo, cloth, 7s. 6d.

THE PSALMS

IN THE 'EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE,' THREE VOLUMES.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 7s. 6d. each.

THE LIFE OF DAVID, AS REFLECTED IN HIS PSALMS

IN THE HOUSEHOLD LIBRARY OF EXPOSITION.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d.

AFTER THE RESURRECTION

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

LAST SHEAVES

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE GOD OF THE AMEN

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

Sermons on the 14th, 15th, and 16th Chapters of the Gospel by John.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

LONDON : HODDER & STOUGHTON

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE WEARIED CHRIST

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

PAUL'S PRAYERS

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE BEATITUDES

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

CHRIST'S 'MUSTS'

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE MUSIC OF THE SOUL

DAILY READINGS FOR A YEAR

Selected and Arranged from the Writings of the Rev. ALEXANDER
MACLAREN, D.D., by the Rev. G. COATES.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE SECRET OF POWER, AND OTHER SERMONS

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

WEEK-DAY EVENING ADDRESSES

DELIVERED IN MANCHESTER

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

MANCHESTER SERMONS (FIRST SERIES)

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

MANCHESTER SERMONS (SECOND SERIES)

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

MANCHESTER SERMONS (THIRD SERIES)

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

A YEAR'S MINISTRY (FIRST SERIES)

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

A YEAR'S MINISTRY (SECOND SERIES)

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

CHRIST IN THE HEART

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

LEAVES FROM THE TREE OF LIFE

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE VICTOR'S CROWNS

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTIES

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

LONDON: HODDER & STOUGHTON

**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

UTL AT DOWNSVIEW



D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C
39 14 28 02 12 008 4